

Weekly Compilation of  
**Presidential  
Documents**



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**Editor's Note:** The President was in Lake Buena Vista, FL, on February 17, the closing date of this issue. Releases and announcements issued by the Office of the Press Secretary but not received in time for inclusion in this issue will be printed next week.

## WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

## PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Week Ending Friday, February 17, 2006

## **The President's Radio Address**

*February 11, 2006*

Good morning. Today I want to talk to you about the new Medicare prescription drug coverage that went into effect on January 1st of this year.

When I came into office, I found a Medicare system that was antiquated and not meeting the needs of America's seniors. The system would pay tens of thousands of dollars for a surgery but not a few hundred dollars for the prescription drugs that could have prevented the surgery in the first place. So working with Congress, we passed critical legislation that modernizes Medicare, provides seniors with more choices, and gives seniors better access to the prescription drugs they need.

Since the program went into effect 6 weeks ago, more than 24 million people with Medicare now have prescription drug coverage, and hundreds of thousands more are enrolling each week. The competition in the prescription drug market has been stronger than expected and is lowering costs for taxpayers and seniors alike. This year, the Federal Government will spend 20 percent less overall on the Medicare drug benefit than projected just last July. The average premium that seniors pay is a third less than had been expected—just \$25 per month instead of \$37 per month. And the typical senior will end up spending about half of what they used to spend on prescription drugs each year.

Last month in Oklahoma City, a senior named Dorothy Brown signed up for Medicare prescription drug coverage. Dorothy has six prescriptions, and previously she paid about \$300 a month for her medicines. A Medicare enrollment counselor at a shopping mall helped Dorothy log on to the Medicare web site, where she typed the information on Dorothy's Medicare card and listed Dorothy's prescriptions. When the counselor was finished, the computer showed five dif-

ferent plans that fit Dorothy's needs. Dorothy chose the least-expensive plan, and now, instead of paying \$300 a month, she will pay about \$36 a month for her medicines. As a result, Dorothy will save more than \$3,000 this year.

For Dorothy and for the vast majority of our seniors, the new prescription drug program is working well. Still, when you make a big change in a program involving millions of people, there are bound to be some challenges, and this has been the case with the new drug coverage. Some people had trouble the first time they went to the pharmacy after enrolling. Information for some beneficiaries was not transferred smoothly between Medicare, drug plans, and the States. And in the early days of the drug coverage, waiting times were far too long for many customers and pharmacists who called Medicare or their drug plans to seek help.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Mike Leavitt has traveled to 18 States in the past 3 weeks to meet with Governors and make sure the prescription drug program is working for everyone, and we're making good progress. We're ensuring that drug plans have more up-to-date information on their beneficiaries, and we're improving data-sharing among Medicare, health plans, and the States. We have also extended the transition period from 30 days to 90 days, to guarantee that seniors do not go without the medicine they need as they switch to a new drug plan. We have also acted to ensure that phone calls to the Medicare help line are now answered with little or no waiting time, and we're working with insurers to help them do the same on their phone lines.

Despite early challenges, the results so far are clear: The new Medicare prescription drug plan is a good deal for seniors. If you're a Medicare recipient and have not yet signed up for prescription drug coverage, I encourage you to review your options and choose the plan that is right for you. Americans who

have parents on Medicare should encourage and help them to sign up. Citizen groups, faith-based organizations, health professionals, and pharmacies across America are working to help answer questions. Seniors can also get information 24 hours a day by calling 1-800-MEDICARE or by visiting the official Medicare web site at [medicare.gov](http://medicare.gov).

Prescription drug coverage under Medicare has been available for just a few weeks, but its benefits will last for decades to come. I was proud to sign this Medicare reform into law. And because we acted, millions of American seniors are now saving money, getting the life-saving drugs they need, and receiving the modern health care they deserve.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:10 a.m. on February 10 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 11. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 10 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

### **Remarks on Presenting the National Medals of Science and Technology**

*February 13, 2006*

Thanks and welcome to the White House. It is an honor to be in the company of so many bright and distinguished Americans. Each of our honorees has been blessed with talent, and each has used their talent to the fullest.

The work we honor today has improved the lives of people everywhere. It has helped to move our economy forward, and it's helped to make sure that America is the leader of innovation in our world. The medals are our Nation's way of expressing gratitude to gifted and visionary citizens. I also appreciate the family members and friends who are here as well.

I want to thank members of my Cabinet who have joined us, Secretary Gutierrez, Secretary Bodman. I want to thank Dr. Jack Marburger, who is the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy. I thank David Sampson from Commerce for joining us. I want to thank Dr. Arden Bement, the

Director of the National Science Foundation, who is with us, Dr. Kathie Olsen, the Deputy Director of the National Science Foundation. I want to thank the representatives from the National Science Foundation and members of the board of the National Science and Technology Medals Foundation. Those were the folks who decided that you won. [*Laughter*]

I thank Dr. Bill Jeffrey who is with us, Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology. I want to thank the previous recipients of the National Medals of Science and Technology who've joined us. I thank my friends Congressman Sherry Boehlert, as well as Dave Reichert from the United States Congress for being here. Thank you both for coming. Most of all, thank you all for joining us.

The medals I'm about to present are the highest award a President can bestow for astounding achievement in science and technology. They recognize work that has helped expand the horizons of human knowledge. The National Medal of Science honors those whose research has enhanced our understanding of life and the world around us. And the National Medal of Technology recognizes innovators whose work keeps America on the cutting edge with discoveries that change the way we live.

The spirit of discovery is one of our national strengths. Our greatest resource has always been the educated, hard-working, ambitious people who call this country their home. From Thomas Edison's light bulb to Robert Ledley's CAT scan machine, most of America's revolutionary inventions began with men and women with the vision to see beyond what is and the desire to pursue what might be.

Think back to how much this country has changed since the—since we first created the National Medal of Technology in 1980. Twenty-five years ago, most Americans used typewriters instead of computers. Most of us used pay phones instead of cell phones. Most of us used carbon paper instead of laser printers. Most of us had rolodexes—you might remember those—[*laughter*]. And on the long family trip, we'd play the license plate game—[*laughter*]*—and now we're watching DVDs.*

Many technologies that are in our laboratories today will bring cures and technologies that are beyond our imagination. And we will then wonder how we ever lived without them. These kinds of changes are the result of years of hard work by American innovators, like those we honor here today.

Over the years, National Science and Technology laureates have been responsible for breakthroughs that revolutionized telecommunications, discovered the structure of DNA, led to the invention of the microchip. These laureates have done work that have revolutionized organ transplants and led to development of global positioning systems and helped feed millions around the world.

Our Nation has a vital stake in the research and discovery that makes these advances possible. And so in my State of the Union, I encouraged our Nation to stay on the leading edge of technology and education. I've talked about an American Competitiveness Initiative that will double over the next 10 years the Federal commitment to the most critical, basic research programs in the physical sciences. I think that's a good use of taxpayers' money.

Six of today's eight science laureates have benefited from past investment in this kind of research. If we want this country to be the most competitive country in the world, we have got to spend money now to make sure we stay on the leading edge of technological change. We've also got to recognize it's in the private sector where most money is spent on research and development, yet we unwisely have allowed the research and development tax credit to expire. If the United States expects to remain competitive in a global economy, we must encourage our private sector to continue to invest in leading-edge technologies, and therefore, we ought to make the research and development tax credit a permanent part of our Tax Code.

We can't be the leading country in the world in science and technology unless we educate scientists and young mathematicians. And so as part of the Competitive Initiative, I'm going to work with the Congress to make sure we extend the same standards in the No Child Left Behind Act that we apply to reading, to math. The facts are that we're doing fine with fourth grade kids in math and

science. The facts also are these, that we're falling off the face of the charts when it comes to eighth grade math, and we've got to change that. And one of the sure ways to change that is to apply special money for kids who need extra help in junior high for math and science.

We can't make sure our children have got math and science—fine math and science courses unless we've got teachers capable of teaching math and science. And one way to do that is to expand education to high school teachers in how to teach Advanced Placement. Advanced Placement programs work. They make a significant difference in the lives of our children. And so by making sure more teachers can teach AP, this country will be better off in making sure that we've got the future scientists and mathematicians living right here in the United States of America.

Another part of the initiative is to encourage school districts to recruit 30,000 math and science professionals to teach in our Nation's classrooms. I mean, we want young kids to think math and science are cool subjects, that it's okay to be a mathematician, that it's exciting to be a scientist. And there's no better way to make sure that young students are encouraged to take math and science than to have successful scientists explain to our students just the wonders of exploration.

You know, I was out in Albuquerque and had a good visit in Intel. They've got an interesting program. They provide incentives for their employees to go into the classrooms of local high schools and community colleges to say to youngsters, "Join us in these exciting fields." And the exciting jobs of the 21st century are going to be in math and science, and the American people must understand that if we don't educate our kids in math and science, the jobs are going to go elsewhere in the years to come. The Competitive Initiative recognizes we're great when it comes to research and development, and we intend to stay that way. But we've also got to be great when it comes to making sure our students have got the skills necessary to compete in the 21st century.

I appreciate the work that today's laureates are doing to inspire young scientists. We've

got some young scientists from Benjamin Banneker High School with us. Thank you all for joining us. I appreciate you being here. I hope that you are inspired by the examples of excellence and success that you see right here in this ceremony today.

You know, it's interesting, people generally do not pursue a career in science or technology with the goal of fame. I'm kind of trying to change that today. [*Laughter*] The work of discovery is quiet and often solitary. Yet all Americans benefit from your imagination and your talent and your resolve. And so today we're here to say thanks for what you've done; thanks for helping improve the quality of life in this country; thanks for inspiring others. Congratulations on your medals, and now the military aide will read the citations.

[*At this point, Lt. Col. Christian Cabaniss, USMC, Marine Corps Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the medals.*]

**The President.** Again, thank you for coming. Got a little reception back here for the honorees and their families. I'm proud to have you here in the White House. May God continue to bless our great Nation. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the East Room at the White House.

### Remarks Following Discussions With United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan

February 13, 2006

**President Bush.** Mr. Secretary-General, thank you. As usual, we had a very constructive dialog. I always enjoy visiting with the Secretary-General. It gives us a chance to talk about our common interests and our desire for peace and liberty around the world.

We had a good discussion on Sudan, with particular emphasis on Darfur. I told the Secretary-General that Mrs. Garang was in to see me the other day and that we had a long discussion—she and I had a long discussion not only about the Darfur region but about implementing the north-south accords. And

I appreciate the Secretary's leadership on that issue.

We talked about the broader Middle East. And there's a lot to talk about. I am very optimistic, however, that democracy and liberty will prevail. And so I want to thank you for your interest and leadership on those particular issues.

We talked about U.N. reform, structural reform, management reform, as well as the reform of the Human Rights Commission. I was most interested in the Secretary-General's thoughts. I appreciate very much his leading on these issues, and we'll continue to work closely through Secretary Bolton—Ambassador Bolton with the Security Council and the United Nations.

And so, Mr. Secretary-General, thanks for coming. It's always a pleasure to welcome you here to the Oval Office. And the floor is yours.

**Secretary-General Annan.** Thank you very much, Mr. President. I also enjoy our periodic exchanges, and I'm very happy that we have agreed to work together on the Darfur issue, working with other governments from Europe, from Asia, and other regions, to ensure that we do have an effective security presence on the ground to protect the IDPs and ensure that humanitarian workers have access to those in need. And of course, this is an issue where all governments have to play their role.

On security—on the U.N. reform and Human Rights Council, I think the President and I agree that we need to reform the Human Rights Council, and it should be done as soon as possible. The President of the General Assembly, Jan Eliasson, is working very hard to ensure that we will have that done by this month, and that when the Human Rights Commission meets in Geneva, it will be in the process of transformation; it will not be business as usual. And I also thanked the President for all the support he's given us on U.N. reform, on the broader U.N. reform. And there are quite a lot of things that we're going to do.

We also discussed the Middle East and the Hamas elections and the need for transformation of Hamas into a political party along the lines that the Quartet had discussed. And I think there is an opportunity

here for Hamas to transform itself into a political party and work with the international community and the Israeli Government.

We also touched on the issue of the nuclear issue in—of Iran. And here again, I hope between now and the time the Atomic Agency issues its next report, there will be indications and steps from the Iranian side to indicate that negotiations are not dead and that both sides can come back to the table and find a way out of this crisis. We need to be able to resolve it, and I hope there will be no steps taken to escalate the situation.

Thank you very much.

**President Bush.** I appreciate you. Good job. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:06 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rebecca Garang, Minister of Transportation, Roads, and Bridges, Government of Southern Sudan; and Ambassador John R. Bolton, U.S. Representative to the United Nations.

### Remarks Honoring the 2005 World Series Champion Chicago White Sox February 13, 2006

**The President.** Welcome. Thank you. Be seated. They may be playing basketball, but it's always baseball season here. [Laughter]

The last time the Chicago White Sox won the World Series was 1917. President Woodrow Wilson was living here. Reinsdorf, I don't know if you came here then or not. [Laughter] There were only eight teams in the American League, and the league leader hit a total of nine home runs. After 88 years of waiting, the White Sox have earned the right to be called world champs, and we're glad you're here.

First of all, I want to welcome Jerry Reinsdorf. Some of my most joyous times in my life have been during—as a baseball owner. Harold Baines may not have thought they were so joyous, since we never won much. [Laughter] And one of the reasons that I ended up in baseball with my partners is because of Jerry Reinsdorf's help, and I want to thank you for that now that we've got the team here. I know how much you love the game, and I know how much you

love the Chicago White Sox. And so it had to be a thrilling moment for you and Eddie and the owners that were patient for all those years you didn't win. And so I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart, and thank you for your friendship. It's great to see you.

I appreciate Ken Williams, a man who obviously knows what he's doing who is—was able to put a team together. It's easy to put stars on the field. The hard thing about baseball is to put people who can play together, and I congratulate you for being a great general manager.

I welcome Ed Farmer and the broadcasting team. Eddie, good to see you again. Thanks. I can see they all remember you—at least one person does. [Laughter]

It's good to be here with Bob DuPuy of baseball. I thought you're here to sign the lease, you know, but it's—[laughter]—another subject.

I do want to thank the members of my Cabinet who are here. It's great to see you all. I thought you all told me you were Red Sox fans. [Laughter]

I want to thank Senator Durbin and Senator Obama from the great State of Illinois, and Don Manzullo and Roy LaHood—Ray LaHood. Thank you all for coming.

I—my question to most of these folks was like, “Were you White Sox fans at the beginning of the season?” [Laughter]

**Audience member.** Yes, he puts us on the spot.

**The President.** Yes, he did. No, I'm not putting you on the spot. But I know one person—elected official who was a White Sox fan at the beginning of the season. As a matter of fact, he was a White Sox fan at the beginning of his life. He's been forever a White Sox fan. He is a great mayor of a great city, and that's the mayor, his honor, Dick Daley. Thanks for coming.

Roland Hemond, good to see you, Roland. Thank you. Just showing off my baseball knowledge. Anybody that knows—[laughter]—knows Roland Hemond knows something about baseball. And it's good to see Harold Baines and the other coaches.

I understand Ozzie is on vacation, which I fully understand. If he's a Caribbean guy, taking a look at the weather forecast up here yesterday would have made me not want to



come as well. [*Laughter*] But I want to congratulate Ozzie Guillen, as well as the team and the staff, the coaching staff, and the managers, and all those who worked hard to make these guys ready to play. And I want to congratulate Ozzie on being a great manager, manager of the year, as well as becoming a United States citizen earlier this year. We're proud to have him as an American citizen.

I don't want to bring up the Sosa trade, so I won't—[*laughter*].

**Audience member.** Please don't.

**The President.** I won't. [*Laughter*] But it's great to see you. Harold Baines is one class act. I mean, that guy can not only hit, but he brought a lot of class into the clubhouse, and I'm really proud to see you here, Harold. Congratulations to you and the buddies you're working with.

And to the players, congratulations. We're really proud to have you here at the White House. It means a lot for baseball fans, White Sox fans, all across the country that you would take time to come and be honored here at the White House, and it's my great honor to honor you. It's a big deal to have you here.

The amazing thing about this team is you went wire to wire, which is really hard to do. You win one-nothing on opening day, and like, they're in your rearview mirror for the rest of the season. It takes a lot to win 99 games and to remain in the lead and not falter. And it says something about the character of the team that you put together and the character of the players.

I got a firsthand report from the World Series from two people I love dearly who had actually front-row seats, and that would be my mother and father. [*Laughter*] I'm not going to tell you who they were rooting for, but it didn't have much effect on the outcome of the series, I'll put it to you that way. [*Laughter*]

I was impressed as a baseball guy—at least somebody who follows it still, closely—that you had four complete games in a row in the playoffs. That's a good strategy, Jerry, to keep the bullpen—[*laughter*—keep the bullpen fresh. [*Laughter*]

You know, there was great players, but nobody off the chart, if you know what I mean, which means you competed as a team.

Jermaine Dye had an interesting quote that I think is worth sharing with people who are paying attention at this moment. He said, "From the start of spring training, everybody was hungry." He didn't say one player was hungry or a guy going into arbitration was hungry or a free agent for next year was hungry. He said everybody was hungry. They're—everybody wanted to go out there and win together. Everybody was pulling on the same rope. That's why you're the world champs. Everybody was pulling on the same rope. And that's what we're here to honor, a great championship team.

I congratulate Jermaine for being the MVP of the World Series. I congratulate Paul for being the MVP of the American League Championship Series. It must be a pretty cool feeling to hit a grand slam in the World Series. I didn't get one in Little League, much less the World Series. [*Laughter*] And you had a grand slam; you caught the last out of the season; and you witnessed the birth of your child all in the same month. Man, what a special month. The Lord has blessed you. That's why you're called Mr. "Soxtober." [*Laughter*]

I know the effect you had on White Sox fans, and it must have been electrifying. One woman in her 90s said, "I've been a Sox fan all my life; I never thought I'd live to see the day." Think about that—think about the joy that you all put in the hearts of this 90-year-old person, and probably some young ones, too, that were pulling for the White Sox.

The people of Chicago turned out en masse not only because you were baseball champs but because you have brought some character to the city. I want to applaud the organization for supporting inner-city Little League. I think it's really important for this great State of baseball to reach out to people of all walks of life to make sure that the sport is inclusive. The best way to do it is to convince little kids how to—the beauty of playing baseball.

I appreciate the baseball fields you're building in Chicago, kind of little centers of hope, little diamonds of joy for people to come and be able to play the greatest game ever invented. I appreciate the Chicago White Sox Charities, your support of cancer

research and cancer treatment in the metropolitan area. Most of all, I appreciate the fact that these players understand they're setting examples for young boys and girls all across Chicago, as well as the country. You're setting the example that serving something greater than yourself is important in life; coming together as a team is a heck of a lot more important and satisfying than worrying about your own batting average or your own ERA.

And so here we are in the White House, Jerry, honoring the great Chicago White Sox. I'm proud to be with you. God bless your championship and God continue to bless the country.

**Paul Konerko.** Mr. President, on behalf of our organization and all the fans on the South Side and all over the world, we want to present you with this jersey and jacket.

**The President.** I thought you were going to give me a loan. [*Laughter*]

**Jermaine Dye.** And also, we know deep down you probably wish this was a Houston Astros jacket. [*Laughter*]

**The President.** Now wait a minute—

**Mr. Dye.** Hopefully this will do.

**Mr. Konerko.** Thanks for having us here today.

**The President.** Actually it was a Texas Rangers jacket. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jerry Reinsdorf, chairman, Harold Baines, bench coach, Eddie Einhorn, vice chairman, Ken Williams, general manager, Ed Farmer, radio broadcaster, Roland Hemond, executive adviser to the general manager, Ozzie Guillen, manager, Jermaine Dye, outfielder, and Paul Konerko, first baseman, Chicago White Sox; Robert A. DuPuy, president and chief operating officer, Major League Baseball; Mayor Richard B. Daley of Chicago, IL; and Sammy Sosa, outfielder, Baltimore Orioles.

### Remarks Honoring the University of Texas at Austin 2005 NCAA Football Champions

February 14, 2006

**The President.** Please be seated, except for you guys up there. [*Laughter*] Welcome to the White House. January 4, 2006, is a

day that a lot of Texas fans will never forget. I called one of those Texas fans, who shall remain anonymous. I said, "How was it?" He said, "That game was the greatest day in my life." [*Laughter*] I said, "Well, how about your wedding?" [*Laughter*] He said, "Yes, that too." [*Laughter*]

I want to welcome Mack and Sally Brown here. Congratulations, Coach, for doing something that—leading this group of great athletes to a victory that made a lot of Texans proud. I know you made a person you admire proud, and a fellow who I wish were here today, but he's not, and that's Coach Darrell Royal. We send Coach Royal our—we send him our very best, and you're following in his footsteps. You know, you've learned something about the press, in all due respect to those that are here—[*laughter*—they tend to underestimate people sometimes—[*laughter*—because I remember they started calling you "Mr. February." Well, today, Mack, you're giving February—the title "Mr. February" a whole new meaning. This February you brought the national champs to the White House.

As you can see, you've brought out a lot of folks here to the South Lawn. We've never had quite a celebration this big here, and it's because there's a lot of Texas fans living here in Washington. But we've got some of the university officials with us. Mr. President, Bill Powers, it's good to see you, sir. I appreciate you coming, and your wife, Kim. It's good to see Mark Yudof and Judy, as well as Samara. Good to see you all again. I see the members of the board of regents, James Huffines and Rita Clements, and other members of the board. Thank you for being here. DeLoss Dodds, I appreciate you doing a fine—there he is. Hi, DeLoss. Yes, sir.

I want to congratulate the coaching staff. One of the members of the staff has had an influence on my life. I might ask him to come up here—Mad Dog. My body is what it is today because of Mad Dog. [*Laughter*] I appreciate you. He told me once—he said, "If you ever make it to Washington, I promise you, Mr. President-to-be, I'm coming up there with a team of champions." And he did. Congratulations. I didn't know you owned a suit. [*Laughter*]

**Jeff Madden.** I had to get one made.

**The President.** I didn't know they had one big enough. *[Laughter]*

But Jeff is——

**Audience members.** Oh. *[Laughter]*

**The President.** One reason the mighty Horns are here is because they were in good shape, and they were tough, and they were in good condition. And the reason they were was because of Jeff Madden and his belief in them as athletes and his willingness to work hard to get them in shape. And so you guys keep listening to him.

I want to thank the members of my Cabinet who are with us today. We appreciate you being here. I want to thank the Members of Congress—Senator Hutchison is a huge Texas fan—as well as Members of the House of Representatives. Thank you all for being here to welcome this great football team. Get back to work here quickly. *[Laughter]*

Mack can tell you what it takes to win, but one thing it takes is a team of great athletes playing together. That's how you win national championships. I suspect it's the difference between showing up and, you know, winning all but two and showing up and winning them all, is that people figured out how to put something greater than themselves on the line—in this case, the University of Texas football team. This was a team that—great power, great finesse. They were real quick.

But the thing that impressed me about the team and—you know, we can follow you here in Washington, DC, just as well as we can follow you in Crawford—is that this team never seemed—that they never figured out the word “lose.” It never entered their vocabulary. Every time they walked on the field, you knew they were going to win. And perhaps one of the reasons why is because they were winners off the field as well.

I'm impressed by Ahmard Hall, who's the fullback. Where is Ahmard? There he is. I don't know if you know this or not, but he was a United States marine. Once a marine, always a marine. He served in Afghanistan and Kosovo. He entered the University of Texas on the GI bill. He's not only a fine blocker—you need to get him to Baltimore—*[laughter]*—he started something called “Momma Bear Cares,” which sends packages to our troops overseas. Congratulations on

being a great player, but more importantly, a great citizen.

Mike Garcia is with us. Where's Mike? There he is. I'm glad we're on the same side. *[Laughter]* Mike was involved in the Children's Miracle Network last spring. I take it you weren't a wide receiver. The point is, is that this guy was good in the trenches of football, and he's good in the trenches of life by supporting people who need our help.

We've got some other—I don't know if you want to call them “big uglies” or not—but Kasey Studdard and Neale Tweedie and David Thomas. Where are those guys? Come on up here. The reason these three guys are here—Will Allen was supposed to be with them, but I think he missed the flight. Slept in—*[laughter]*—or study hall. *[Laughter]* These fellas took time out of their lives to go to the Austin Children's Hospital to bring some joy into a kid's life. You might have frightened them when they first saw you. *[Laughter]* But my point to you is, is that a championship football team is made up of people of character and decency.

One final athlete I want to recognize is, of course, Vince Young, the great quarterback who—*[applause]*.

**Head Coach Mack Brown.** They didn't bring his suit.

**The President.** Oh, that's all right; he doesn't need a suit. *[Laughter]*

**Mr. Brown.** He was supposed to bring it—forgot.

**The President.** Yes, you can borrow a tie. *[Laughter]* I think Vince will tell you that the reason he got to where he is today is because of his teammates. One reason why Vince got to where he is, as well, is because he understands that the role of a star is to put something back in the community into which you were raised. I was impressed by his being involved in a program called LEAP, which means, “learn, enjoy, and play.” It's basically a chance for somebody like Vince to go in and say to some other—to a young child, “Here's what it takes to succeed in life.” It's called mentoring. And all these athletes, whether they know it or not, are mentoring by the way they behave, by the example they set for young kids all across Texas and all across the country.

I want to congratulate Coach and Sally for setting the examples they've set for these players. They're instrumental in what's called the Rise School in Austin. It's a school that helps infants and toddlers and preschool children with developmental disabilities. They're very much involved with the Capital Campaign for the Helping Hands in Austin. They, like these players, are good citizens.

I also want to say congratulations to the coach for not only being a good—having a good football team, being able to raise these young men to butt heads harder than the other ones around the country, but nearly half the team earned a spot on the UT athletic director's honor roll for posting a 3.0 grade point average last fall.

This team won a lot of football games and won the national championship, but of the 32 seniors on the team, 28 will have earned their degrees by the end of this summer—and one of those, who hasn't quite earned it yet, made a promise to his mother. And Vince, I'd suggest you honor that promise to your mother—[laughter]—and get your degree by the end of this summer, which I know he will.

All in all, we're honored to have a great group of individuals, people who brought great pride to our State and pride to a great university. Welcome to Washington. Congratulations to the national champs, the University of Texas.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:07 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Darrell Royal, former head coach, University of Texas at Austin football team; William Powers, Jr., president, University of Texas at Austin, and his wife, Kim Heilbrun; Mark G. Yudof, chancellor, University of Texas System, his wife, Judy, and his daughter, Samara; James R. Huffines, chairman, and Rita C. Clements, vice chairman, board of regents, University of Texas System; DeLoss Dodds, men's athletic director, University of Texas at Austin; and Mike Garcia, offensive guard, Kasey Studdard, offensive guard, Neale Tweedie, tight end, David Thomas, tight end, and Will Allen, offensive guard, University of Texas at Austin football team.

## **Statement on the Anniversary of the Death of Former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri of Lebanon**

*February 14, 2006*

One year ago today, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated. Mr. Hariri was a great Lebanese patriot who worked to rebuild a free, independent, and prosperous Lebanon after years of brutal civil war. Our thoughts are with the people of Lebanon as they mark this anniversary.

Lebanon has continued to make progress in the year since Mr. Hariri's murder, thanks to the foundation of freedom he laid and the determination of the Lebanese people. Lebanon has conducted a free and fair parliamentary election and begun economic reforms. Great challenges remain, and the United States will continue to stand with the people of Lebanon as they strive to build a free and democratic future.

## **Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report by the National Science Board**

*February 14, 2006*

*To the Congress of the United States:*

Consistent with 42 U.S.C. 1863(j)(1), I transmit herewith a report prepared for the Congress and the Administration by the National Science Board entitled, "Science and Engineering Indicators—2006." This report represents the seventeenth in the series examining key aspects of the status of science and engineering in the United States.

**George W. Bush**

The White House,  
February 14, 2006.

## **Remarks on Health Care in Dublin, Ohio**

*February 15, 2006*

Thanks for coming. Please be seated. Jack, thanks for the introduction; thanks for letting us convert your lobby into a—[laughter]—place to come and visit.

So I get on Air Force One this morning. I said, "Take me to Dublin"—the guy heads

east. *[Laughter]* I said, “Nuh-uh, Dublin, Ohio.” *[Laughter]* Proud to be here. Thanks for letting me come and visit with you. It’s neat to be in “the House that Dave Built.” He was a great American.

George Voinovich and I were sharing Dave Thomas stories, particularly when he came and helped educate and lead the Governors—that’s when we were Governors—about adoption. And one of his great legacies is inspiring people to show the ultimate act of love, which is to adopt a child. The other great legacy is, leave behind a great company that is providing thousands with good jobs; another great legacy is to leave behind consumer choice. You can either get your three-quarter pound triple cheeseburger—*[laughter]*—or your salad. *[Laughter]*

I appreciate the fact that Wendy’s understands that choice for the consumers is important. I also appreciate the fact that Wendy’s understands that giving employees the opportunity to make rational choices in health care is an important part of having a workforce that is vigorous, active, and enthused about their jobs. And so today I’m here to talk about innovation in the health place, how we can make sure the health care system in the United States of America remains the best in the world.

And so, Jack, thanks for letting me come. Thanks for being an innovator. I love the entrepreneurial spirit of America. And the entrepreneurial spirit doesn’t end if you happen to be a big company. As a matter of fact, it’s important to remain entrepreneurial, no matter what your size is. And to have a company like Wendy’s introduce HSAs, which I’m about to talk about, reminds me that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well here.

I appreciate the team, the management team, and all the employees for giving me a chance to come and visit. I will keep my remarks relatively short so you can get back to work. *[Laughter]*

Governor, thank you for coming. I appreciate Governor Bob Taft joining us. Yesterday I had the privilege of meeting with his wife, Hope. We were talking about how to rally the great armies of compassion around the United States to help provide love and help and concern for those amongst us who need love and help and concern.

I want to thank my friend Senator George Voinovich. I’ve known him for a long time. He’s steady; he is capable; he is a great public servant. Thank you for being here, George.

I want to thank the Members of the United States Congress who managed to get a free flight on Air Force One—*[laughter]*—to come and join us. I’m better for the fact that you accompanied me; thank you. And that would be Pat Tiberi, the United States Congressman from this district. Congressman David Hobson is with us as well—as well as Congresswoman Deborah Pryce. Thank you all for coming today.

The speaker of the house is with us; Mr. Speaker, thanks for joining us. The president of the Ohio Senate is with us. Glad you guys are here; thanks for coming. I also want to mention Senator Steve Stivers, United States Senator, Lieutenant Colonel in the Ohio National Guard. He served a 12-month tour of duty in the Middle East and Africa. I appreciate your service. God bless you and your family, and God bless all our troops in harm’s way.

I skipped the majority leader—I didn’t mean to—Mr. Majority Leader, in fact, it’s an oversight, you know? Thank you for being here, Larry Flowers. I want to thank the mayor of the city of Dublin for joining us. Appreciate you coming, Mayor. I’m honored you’re here. Thanks for taking time out of your schedule.

I just met with some folks that work here at Wendy’s—I’ll talk about them later. But I also met with the owner of a restaurant here, Frank Ciotola. I met with Shawn Kessinger; he’s the vice president of finance for the Ohio Credit League Union. I met with a farmer, Debbie Carr. We talked about health care from the perspective of small-business owners, entrepreneurs. I listened to their concerns; I listened to their solutions. And as I begin to give this address on the health care system, I want you to know that many of their thoughts are incorporated in what the vision is for good health care. So thanks for taking time to be here today.

Let me start by giving you kind of a state of the economy: It’s strong. I recognize there’s parts of Ohio that aren’t necessarily as strong as other parts of the country. But from an overall perspective, when you look

at the Nation's economy, it's strong, and it's getting stronger. And the reason I say that is because we're now in our fifth year of uninterrupted economic growth.

Last year, this economy, in spite of high energy prices and in spite of natural disasters, grew at 3.5 percent. After-tax income of our people—and that matters a lot, you know, whether or not people have got money in their pocket after paying their taxes—is up 8 percent since 2001. Productivity is high. It's important to have high productivity growth in an economy because that's how economies improve their standard of living for their people. The more productive you are as a citizen or the more productive you are as a company, the more likely it is you will generate higher revenues and higher quality of life.

And so productivity is increasing, which is a measurement of not only this country's competitiveness, but as a measure of whether or not life is improving for our citizens. Small businesses are thriving. That's really good news. Most new jobs in America are created by small businesses. And when the small-business sector is thriving, it means people are working. We've added 4.7 million new jobs over the last 2½ years. The national unemployment rate is 4.7 percent. That's low.

Things are improving here in Ohio. The unemployment rate is still 5.9 percent, but nevertheless, the trends are in good shape. You've gone from 6.4 percent to 5.9 percent. Obviously, there's still work to do. George and members of the delegation are concerned about trade that is fair and free. He wants the manufacturers here in Ohio to be treated fairly in places like China. I assured him I understand it's part of my job. I'm going to India at the end of this month, and I'm going to make it clear to the Indians, "We will look forward to trading with you, but just treat us the way we treat you; that's all we ask." The reason I say that is because we can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere, so long as the rules are fair.

The fundamental question is, how do we remain a leader in the world economy? You know, there's uncertainty in this economy of ours. People are changing work a lot—that kind of creates a sense of uncertainty. People see China and India out there looming as

competitors, and the reaction with some is, "Let's don't compete; let's just kind of shut her down; let's get protectionist," or, "Why don't we isolate." I have a different point of view. My attitude is, we shouldn't fear the future; we ought to shape the future. My attitude is, the United States of America must continue to be the leader in the world economy, for the good of our people.

And so here are some ways as to how to make sure this economy remains strong today and remains strong for years to come. First, in order for us to be a leader in the world, we've got to remain a leader when it comes to technological developments. So I'm proposing to the Congress an American Competitiveness Initiative, which will double the basic research in basic sciences over the next 10 years.

And secondly, I recognize most research is done in the private sector, and yet the incentive for companies to invest in research, which yields technologies, which increases standard of living and makes sure our economy is on the leading edge, is through the research and development tax credit. It expires on an annual basis. It is very difficult for private sector to plan when a Tax Code is uncertain. And so Congress, in order to make sure that we invest in the future, should make the research and development tax credit a permanent part of our Tax Code.

Finally, in order to remain competitive, we've got to have kids who understand math and science. And so I laid out an initiative—I spent some time talking about it last week. I'm going to continue talking about it. I'm looking forward to working with—this is an issue, by the way, where we can put aside needless politics, which tends to dominate Washington, DC, and focus on the good for the future of this country. I'm confident we can get something done on this very important education as well as research and technology issue.

In order to make sure we're competitive, we've got to be wise about your money. The tax relief we passed is working. In order to make sure America is the most competitive Nation in the world, we've got to keep your taxes low and be wise about how we spend your money, which means we've got to learn to set priorities in Washington, DC. We can't

try to be all things to all people when it comes to spending your money. We're on the way to cutting this deficit in half by 2009, and I intend to keep us on track to cut the deficit in half by 2009.

But to be wise—to be competitive in the future, we've got to get off being hooked on Middle Eastern oil. In order for us to grow—I said something in the State of the Union that probably surprised some of you. I said, we have a serious problem; we're addicted to oil. But I meant what I said. I fully understand that an economy that requires oil from parts of the world that—where some countries may not like us, puts our economic security at risk and puts our national security at risk. And I'm serious about working with members of both parties to advance technological research that will enable us to drive cars by using switch grass as a base stock of ethanol—or wood chips, as well as the corn and soybeans we use today. I mean, I can't wait for the day, and I know future Presidents can't wait for the day, when somebody walks in with the farm report, and says, “Mr. President, the crops are up, and we're less dependent on Middle Eastern oil.” And it's coming; it's coming.

To keep this country competitive, we need a health care system that provides Americans with high-quality care at good prices. And that's what I want to talk about today. The health care costs are rising sharply in America. If they continue rising the way they are, that will make us less competitive. Many Americans are worried that they're not going to get the treatments they need. Small businesses, in particular, are struggling to pay for health care for their employees. If two-thirds of the new jobs in America are created by small businesses, and your small-business owner is struggling to keep their employee base because of health care, then we've got to do something about it. Workers have lost good coverage because they're changing jobs. I've told you, there's uncertainty in the marketplace because people are changing work. And if you fear about losing health care when you change work, it creates even more uncertainty.

More than 45 million Americans have no health insurance at all, and this is unacceptable for our country. We've got the best

health care system in the world, make no mistake about it. The question is, how do we keep it that way? And I've got some ideas for you.

First of all, we've got to choose between two competing philosophies when it comes to health care. Behind all the rhetoric in Washington and all the proposals, there's really a philosophical debate. On the one hand, there's some folks who—good-hearted folks, good, decent folks who believe that Government ought to be making the decisions for the health care industry. And there are some of us who believe that the health care industry ought to be centered on the consumer.

I think as we kind of make our minds up about what philosophy works, it's important to look at the world health care systems. Other nations have adopted for Government control of health care for centralized decisionmaking when it comes to health care, which has created long waiting lines and quality of care not as good as the American system and a significant lag in technological development.

We've done a different path up to now in our Nation's history. We believe in private medicine that encourages innovation and change. That's been the cornerstone of American public health up until now. And we have a choice to make. I've made my choice; I'm going to lead the Congress to make sure that our health care system preserves America's system of private medicine, that we strengthen the relationship between doctors and patients, and that we make the benefits of private medicine more affordable and accessible for our citizens. That's our strategy.

Obviously, Government has a role to play. We have made a commitment to the poor and the elderly in the United States, and it's a commitment we're going to keep. When I got to Washington, I took a look at the Medicare system. It's a very important part of our Nation's health care system, and that is Medicare, except it was old and tired and hadn't been changed. It was a centrally-controlled system. I'll give you an example of what I meant by old and tired. This is a system that paid \$28,000 for ulcer surgery—when you've got an ulcer, you check in the

hospital—Medicare would write you a \$28,000 check. It wouldn't pay the \$500 necessary to prevent the ulcer from happening in the first place. In other words, medicine had begun to change, and Medicare didn't change with it. One reason why is because it's centrally controlled; all decisions had to be made by people out of Washington, DC.

And so I worked with Members of the United States Congress to modernize the system. I said, "If we've got a commitment to our elderly, let's make the commitment a good one." We're not going to make the commitment and have it be a mediocre commitment; it ought to be a good, sound commitment. And we did. And we added the prescription drug benefit to Medicare that modernizes the system.

And at the same time, we gave seniors more options from which to choose. See, part of making sure a health care system works, seems like to me, the consumers ought to have more choice. In a centralized system, the Government makes the choice. In a private system that focuses on kind of the markets, people ought to have a choice. People ought to be able to be given different options from which to choose.

And so we did modernize the system. It's tough sledding up there in Washington to get things changed. *[Laughter]* People like the status quo at times. Twenty-four million Americans have now signed up to the new Medicare plan since January 1st. That's a lot of folks, 24 million. Hundreds of thousands are enrolling each week. Now, needless to say, when you have a change that size, there's going to be some things that need to be adjusted in the system. And you probably read about kind of the dual-eligible problem. I don't know if you've had that problem here in Ohio, Governor. We're dealing with it. Our job is to solve problems when they arise. When you have that big a shift, you can imagine there's going to be glitches. But by far, the vast majority of people are signing up to a program that's making a big difference in their lives.

Competition—in other words, when you have choices, it creates a sense of competition in the marketplace—is lowering costs for American seniors. The average premium that seniors now pay for the prescription drug

benefit is a third less than what was expected. In other words, when we started rolling out the plan it was expected that the prescription drug benefit would cost the seniors \$37 a month. The actual cost is \$25 a month. It's an interesting lesson about what can happen when you give people different options from which to choose.

The other thing that's important for you all to know is that the typical senior will end up spending about half of what he or she used to spend on prescription drugs. I mean, if you want the system to function well, it seemed like to me and others here that we ought to modernize the system to make it good for our seniors. It's working.

If you happen to have a mother or father or a neighbor who's a senior, I strongly urge you to get your loved one or your friend to call 1-800-Medicare or to go on the web at [medicare.gov](http://medicare.gov) and help that person realize the great new options available to him or her.

Medicaid, as well, is a program that we take very seriously. It's a program aimed at helping the poor. It's administered in conjunction with States. It is health care for low-income families with children, poor seniors, and disabled Americans. It's a very important program. It needed to be restructured, however, in order to make the program actually work in a cost-effective way. And so we decided to work with the States to give Governors and folks at the local level more flexibility in how to structure the program to meet the needs at the local level.

See, in the past, if you had a good idea, if old Taft had a good idea, he had to come to Washington and beg permission for a waiver: "I, the Governor, was elected to do something good for the people. I'm worried about those who are qualified for Medicaid. Please give me permission to do what I think is right." The new bill I signed is one which will make the States—give States a lot more flexibility when it comes time to signing up people—to designing eligibility standards to providing what the programs ought to look like. In other words, it's flexibility all aiming to make sure the Medicaid system works well.



We take the program seriously, but we fully understand what happens when the bureaucracy becomes so encrusted that it's impossible to design programs that will actually meet States budgetary needs as well as the needs of the people. And we're remedying that fact.

I mentioned to you we have the goal of making sure that our budgets are responsible. One of—the budget I just signed or the bill I just signed and the budget I proposed is finally beginning to do something about the growth in Medicare and Medicaid. I want to describe to you a little bit about what we're doing.

Let me give you this story, kind of an analogy—there is a difference between slowing your car down to the speed limit or putting your car into reverse. I want you to think about that as I explain to you that, in working with the Congress, we have slowed Medicare growth down from 8.1 percent a year to 7.7 percent a year. In other words, we found ways to reform the system so that we can slow the growth rate down to make Medicare more affordable for future generations. We're not putting the car in reverse; we're just finding the speed limit.

Same thing with Medicaid. It grows—slow it down from 6.9 percent a year to 6.6 percent a year, which means just by slowing the growth rate down on those two important programs and, at the same time, making them more efficient and delivering better services, we're saving the taxpayers \$104 billion over 5 years. I want to thank the Congress for working on this. You hear rhetoric, of course, that we're "starving the poor." The car is going the speed limit; it's not going backwards.

Now, the long-term solution for Medicare requires—and Social Security—requires an understanding that we've got a lot of baby boomers getting ready to retire. The true strain on our budget is really going to be the unfunded deficits caused by a baby boom generation retiring, with fewer workers to pay for guys like me. See? I mean, a lot of us are retiring. As a matter of fact, my retirement date is—I turn 62 on 2008, which is—[laughter]—pretty convenient time to retire. [Laughter] There's a lot of us, a whole lot

of us. And there are fewer people paying in the system per person retiring.

And what's interesting—and you've got to know this—is that my generation has been promised greater benefits than a previous generation. So you can imagine when you start to think about the strain, a lot of us have been promised greater benefits with fewer people paying for us. And it's not going to work; it's simply not going to work.

I was very serious in the State of the Union—and I explained this to George and the Congressmen—that I understand a solution to Social Security and Medicare in terms of dealing with a bulge of retirees is going to require a bipartisan solution. And I mean it to Members of Congress—I expect there to be a bipartisan effort to come up with a solution. Nothing will pass the House or the Senate unless there's agreement. And now is the time to put aside the politics that have stopped rational people from coming up with a rational answer to a very serious problem, to set it aside, sit down at the table, and solve this problem once and for all—so we can travel the country looking at young workers and saying, "You're not going to pay payroll taxes into a bust system anymore. You're going to pay payroll taxes into a system which will be around not only for baby boomers like me but for a young generation of Americans coming up." Now is the time for us to get something done.

I want to talk about another program that's working. One of the things that we've got to do is spend time in Washington actually measuring results of programs. You know, every title on a bill sounds just fantastic, you know. [Laughter] The problem is, is that every bill doesn't deliver the results it's supposed to. I will tell you about a program that does. It fits into a vision of a health care system where the Government does have responsibility, and that's community health centers.

One of the real strains on local hospitals and local health providers is the fact that the poor and the indigent use emergency rooms for primary care—it's an incredibly inefficient use of assets. It's an important use of assets if somebody can't find care and they need help—I'm not denigrating the people

going to the emergency rooms, but I am saying there's a better way to be wise about how we spend your money and to solve a very important problem. And that is have the emergency rooms be there for emergencies, and have primary care facilities like community health centers being there for primary care for the indigent and the poor.

Since I took office, we've opened or expanded about 800 health centers. There are now 3,700 of these centers around the United States serving 13 million Americans. It is a cost-effective way to provide primary care for those who need help. And I'm going to call upon Congress and work with Congress to put 400 more of those health centers in.

So what I'm telling you is, is that the Federal Government obviously has a role, to make sure the Medicare system is cost-effective and works well, make sure Medicaid works well and gives flexibility to States, and to expand community health centers.

I now want to talk to you about how the rest of us need to have a health care system, if you don't fall into those categories. What should the role of the Government be? And I believe the role of the Government ought to be to empower consumers to make choices. And so let me talk to you about five ideas I have to make sure that health care is more available and more affordable.

And the first one is to expand health savings accounts. I call them HSAs. When you hear me say HSA, that's kind of government-speak for health savings account. They—HSAs are helping to begin a movement away from what's called a third-party payer system to one where the consumer is very much involved in making wise purchases of health care. That's a very important philosophical point.

The traditional insurance today will cover your health care costs—most of your health care costs—in exchange for a high premium payment up front. The costs are generally shared by you and your employer. You may also pay a small deductible and copayment at the time of treatment. What's interesting about this system is that those payments cover only a fraction of the actual costs of health care, the rest of which are picked up

by a third party, basically your insurance company.

It means most Americans have no idea what their actual cost of treatment is. You show up; you got a traditional plan; you got your downpayment; you pay a little copay, but you have no idea what the cost is. Somebody else pays it for you. And so there's no reason at all to kind of worry about price. If somebody else is paying the bill, you just kind of—hey, it seems like a pretty good deal.

There's no pressure for an industry to lower price. And so what you're seeing is price going up. If you don't care what you're paying, and the provider doesn't have any incentive to lower, the natural inclination is for the cost to go up. And the insurance companies, sure enough, pass on the costs—the increase in cost to you and your employer. That's what's happening.

The fundamental problem with traditional coverage is that there's no incentive to control how their health care dollars are spent. You don't have any incentive, whatsoever. And that's one of the cost drivers in our system. If we want to solve health care problems, if we want to make health care affordable and available, we've got to analyze and address the cost-drivers of health care. And there's one right there. If patients controlled how their health care dollars are spent, the result is better treatment at lower cost.

I'll give you an interesting example of a procedure called LASIK—laser eye surgeries. It's a good example of how the market can work when there's not a third-party payer involved. You might remember when LASIK first appeared, was approved about a decade ago for its use. It went through the process of getting a Government approval, and when approved, it was an opportunity for people to have their eyesight—feeling a little nervous about LASIK surgery when it first came out, and it was awfully expensive. Consumers began to, however, inquire as to why something costs the way it costs, how safe it was. Doctors felt more comfortable starting to offer more and more of the surgery. More providers came in the market; there was transparency of pricing. You might—I can remember billboards springing up with people advertising LASIK surgery. Today, the price of LASIK surgery has dropped dramatically.

More people are getting the surgery; they're giving up their glasses and contact lenses.

The market is working. I think if you go back and look at the history of the pricing of LASIK surgery, the availability of LASIK surgery, you'll find that when consumers start showing up saying, "I want to know more information; I'm interested in this idea, how about—how does your cost compare to old Joe's over here"—the market began to adjust. LASIK surgery is now more widespread, at much more reasonable cost for consumers.

And so, how to affect those kinds of cost changes in the health care industry, that's what we're really here to discuss. And one way to do so is to—to make health care more responsive is through health savings accounts. Many people in our country don't know what a health savings account is. I will start to try to explain it here.

First, it is a part of our drive to make health care more consumer-driven. There's two components to a health savings account; one is low-cost catastrophic insurance coverage, and a tax-free health savings account. Those are the two components of what I'm talking about. Catastrophic coverage protects you and the family in the event of devastating medical illness—if you're really sick, a catastrophic plan kicks in.

The health savings account portion of this product allows you and your employer to contribute tax-free to pay for routine medical costs. In other words, your company or yourself or a combination of the two makes a tax-free contribution into a health savings plan, a savings plan that you own. It's yours to call your own. And the savings within that plan are tax-free. In other words, you're not just going to put it under your pillow; you put it into a bank until you use it. The interest will be tax-free. Your money is growing.

It means that if you don't spend money in your savings account on health care, you can roll it over to the next year, tax-free. You have money growing for health care to pay incidental expenses; it's growing at a reasonable interest rate; it's yours you call your own. And if you don't spend it in a year, you can put it into the next year and the next year and the next year.

For many routine medical needs, HSAs mean you can shop around until you get the

best treatment for the best price. In other words, it's your money; you're responsible for routine medical expenses; the insurance pays for the catastrophic care. You're responsible for paying for the portion of your health care costs up to your deductible. And so you—you talk to your doctor; you say, "Well, can't we find this drug at a little cheaper cost?" Or you go to a specialist, "Maybe we can do this a little better—old Joe does it for X; I'm going—why don't you try it for Y?" It allows you to choose treatment or tests that meet your needs in a way that you're comfortable with when it comes to paying the bills.

In other words, decisions about routine medical treatments are made by you and the doc, not by third-party people that you never know. And all of a sudden, when you inject this type of thinking in the system, price starts to matter. You're aware of price. You begin to say, "Well, maybe there's a better way to do this and more cost-effective way."

The combined cost of catastrophic insurance coverage and HSA contributions are usually less expensive than traditional coverage. That's important to know. In other words, HSAs are making health care more affordable. By the way, these HSAs became expanded—George tried to do it in the mid-1990s, 1996 I think—yes—medical savings accounts, he called them. He couldn't get them going. People who had the business didn't want any competition, which sometimes happens in the marketplace. [*Laughter*] But he thought of the idea; it made sense. This really—these HSAs have kicked off big time because of the Medicare bill I signed. And they haven't been around a long time. They're just kind of a fresh product that the marketplace is becoming used to.

Forty percent of those who own HSAs have family incomes below \$50,000 a year. In other words, if people are having trouble affording traditional insurance, all of a sudden the HSA becomes a more affordable product. HSAs make a difference—are making health care more accessible to those without insurance. In the first year HSAs were available, more than a third of those who bought HSAs had been uninsured. In other

words, as health care becomes more affordable, it makes it easier, obviously, for somebody who is uninsured to be able to pick up health insurance.

You know, a lot of young folks are uninsured. You might remember the days when you kind of felt like you were never going to get sick. *[Laughter]* So why should you buy insurance? Why do you need coverage? A lot of young folks are saying, "Wait a minute, this is a pretty good deal. If I'm going to stay healthy and can save a portion of that money, tax-free, and I'm not going to spend money on health care for a while, all of a sudden a nest egg really begins to build." By the way, it's a nest egg they call their own, not something the Government—if there's excess money in your account, the Government can't take it away, or insurance can't take it away; it's yours. You own the thing. It's a vital part of kind of a responsible society is when there's a sense of ownership in important parts of our economy.

Over the last 10 months, the number of HSAs has tripled. In other words, people are becoming aware. One of the reasons I'm here talking about HSAs at Wendy's is because you've decided to implement this product. I want people to be aware of it. The number of people who bought HSAs has gone from a million to 3 million. I'm going to talk today about ways to make sure that HSAs are—even expand even further.

You know, I can remember the debate in Washington—I'm sure you can as well—I remember one person who said, "Health savings accounts are not a solution for the uninsured; they're regressive; they favor the wealthy." It's just not the facts. They've helped the uninsured, and a lot of folks with incomes under \$50,000 are buying these plans. It's kind of basically saying, "If you're not making a lot of money, you can't make decisions for yourself." That's kind of a Washington attitude, isn't it, "We'll decide for you; you can't figure it out yourself." I think a lot of folks here at Wendy's would argue that point of view is just simply backwards and not true.

People have said that expanding HSAs would fail to reduce health care costs. It's just not the case. I just talked to Joe Cava—he knows what it's done to your costs.

Wendy's decided to take on this product. You were facing double-digit increases in the cost of providing health care. That's a strain if you're a CEO. In order to have a workforce, you've got to have a workforce that's comfortable with the health care plan, and all of a sudden, it's beginning to take big bites out of the balance sheet. It's hard to expand your business, it's hard to grow when more and more of your costs are being consumed by health care. And it provides a real tension for small-business owners or large business managers—how do you take care of your people? No corporation, no entity can run unless the people are taken care of and, at the same time, expand your business.

The company wanted to reduce projected health care increases. You didn't want to keep passing on the high costs of—increasing costs to your employees. So they adopted HSAs. About 9,000 of Wendy's full-time employees and their families have got HSAs. In other words, Wendy's said, "Why don't we give people a chance to make health care decisions themselves." They don't have some of the attitude in Washington. If you believe like Washington believes, you would never try an HSA because, "People can't decide for themselves," see? That's not what the folks here at Wendy's thought.

At the end of the first year with HSAs, more than 90 percent of Wendy's employees had positive balances in their savings accounts. In other words, there's a sharing ratio. The company paid—helped pay the premium for the catastrophic care. They shared the money that goes in to help pay for incidental or routine expenses. But 90 percent of the folks didn't use all the money for the routine expenses. It's kind of interesting, maybe it helps preventative medicine, I guess—when you're watching your own money, and you realize that if you take care of your body and you exercise and you don't do stupid things, you end up saving money. *[Laughter]* And when you save money, it's your money, not the company's money.

Medical claims through this company have decreased by 17 percent since they've implemented HSAs. It's an interesting statistic, I think. After more than 5 years of health care costs going at double-digit rates, Wendy's

overall health care costs rose only by 1 percent last year. HSAs have had a positive effect. This has a positive effect on the individual employee; it's had a positive effect on the income statement of the company. They work.

And, Jeff, you made a good—get the boy a raise. [*Laughter*] Here's what he said—you know, never mind. He said, "We entered into this plan to use our money more wisely and to allow our employees to use their money wisely." Kind of an interesting corporate concept, to allow our employees to use their own—more money wisely. "It's making health care more transparent," Jeff says, "and making improved health more sustainable for our employees and for all the consumers of health care." I think he gets it. He gets the philosophy of having a consumer-driven system.

The savings have allowed Wendy's to raise the company's contribution to its employees' HSA accounts. By saving money on health insurance, it enables them to put more money into your account, which has got to be a heck of a good benefit, working for this company. It's your money now; it grows tax-free. It goes in tax-free; it grows tax-free; and you take it out tax-free.

I met with Marla Hipsher. Thanks for coming, Marla. She works here. She is a senior paralegal for 4 years. She was part of the briefing party that was there when I arrived. She is a single mom with a 24-year-old daughter and two teenage sons. As an aside, she has the toughest job in America, being a single mother. She obviously cares about her health care for herself and, more importantly, for her children. Marla's sons are on her HSA plan with her. In other words, it's a family plan. She enjoys the choice. She's comfortable with the control she has over her HSA. Marla's premiums with her HSA are 18 percent lower than the traditional plan she used to have at Wendy's. She's saving money. It makes it easier to do the hardest job in America, which is being a single mother. She likes her HSA so much, she's helping her 24-year-old daughter look into setting one up herself. Listen to your mother; it makes a lot of sense. [*Laughter*]

I want folks who don't understand HSAs to listen to what Marla has to say: "It has

made me more informed, because you discuss it with your doctor now." She's talking about health care. "You want to know up front what it's going to cost and what you need to know. You become a better informed consumer." HSAs are working; they're working. And I'm looking forward to working with Congress to expand them to more Americans.

I'm going to talk about three ways to make them more attractive, so more people can have the benefits of an HSA, like Marla or the small-business owners we've had. The greatest obstacle—one of the greatest obstacles to expansion of HSAs is the Tax Code. One problem is that under current law, employers and employees pay no income or payroll tax on any health insurance provided through the workplace. The health care plan here at Wendy's, you don't pay for it. It's a benefit that's not taxable. Those who buy their insurance on their own don't get the same tax break. That means that the self-employed, the unemployed, and workers at companies that do not provide insurance are at a disadvantage. The playing field isn't level. And so I believe that one thing Congress needs to do is to give Americans who purchase their own HSA policies the same tax breaks as those who get their health insurance from their employers.

Another problem is that under current law, the amount you can put into your HSA tax-free is limited to the amount of your deductible. But sometimes your out-of-pocket expenses are greater than your deductible. That's because on some catastrophic plans, there is an additional copay, and therefore, when you—you're paying after-tax dollars under the current law if you exceed the amount of money you spend beyond your deductible. We can change that. We can raise the cap on the amount of money you put into your HSA so it remains tax-free, so that all out-of-pocket expenses can be covered. That's the important—[*applause*].

And finally, HSAs—we want to make sure they meet the practical needs of today's workers. I told you, people are changing jobs. And one of the problems is a lot of folks fear that when they change jobs, they're going to lose their health care. And that means—people feel like they've got to get locked into

a job because of health care, and that's not right. We need more—they need to be more thoughtful to our workers and recognize that this is a changing world in which we live. And so we ought to make sure people can take their own health savings account with them job to job.

Today, the savings in your health account—health savings account are portable; portable means you can take it job to job. So you've got savings in your own account; you can take it with you. But the health insurance that comes with the account you can't take with you, because of outdated laws and practices that prevent insurers from offering portable policies. So I believe that health insurers should be allowed to sell portable HSA policies nationwide.

You see, it's like car insurance. If you change jobs, you can take your car insurance with you. You can't take your insurance in your HSA with you. In order to make sure this economy works better, in order to make sure the health care system functions better for our workers, we've got to make sure portability in HSAs is consistent and real. It's going to make a difference in people's lives when Congress gets that done.

The second policy—way to make—making sure health care is affordable and accessible is to increase transparency in our health care system. To be smart consumers, you need to be informed consumers. It's hard to make wise choices unless you have information available. In order to spend your HSA dollars wisely, you need to know in advance what your options are. You need to know the quality of doctors and hospitals in your area; you need to know the full extent of procedures that someone recommends to you.

You know, like when you buy a new car, you have access to consumer research on safety, you have access to information on reliability, you can compare price. There's performance data. You can become an informed consumer before you purchase your automobile. And that same sense of transparency and information ought to be available in health care. A modern health care system recognizes that people ought to be encouraged to shop for quality and price. And so the health care industry and the insurance industry needs to provide reliable informa-

tion about prices and quality on most common medical procedures.

Tomorrow I'm going to have a little visit with people in the insurance industry and the health care industry and the business industry to encourage transparency. I know Members of Congress are working on a bill. It would, better this be done with people saying, "Oh, we understand it's important to be transparent." There's always a bill out there in case the voluntarism is not quite as strong as it should be. *[Laughter]*

Third policy that's important is to apply modern information technology to our medical system. Doctors practice 21st century medicine; they still have 19th century filing systems. And this is an important issue. One reason it's an important issue, because when a doc writes their files by hand, you generally can't read the writing. *[Laughter]* That leads to inefficiency and error. In hospitals there is more risk of preventable medical error when records are handwritten, instead of being cross-checked on a computer. Oftentimes doctors duplicate expensive tests because they do not have access to previous results. In other words, the medical system has not taken advantage of information technology like I'm sure Wendy's has, or other industries around the country.

And so I set a goal in 2004 that most Americans would have an electronic health record within 10 years. You'd have your own health record on a chip. And we're making pretty good progress toward that goal. Mike Leavitt is the Secretary of Health and Human Services. He's got a whole division inside HHS aiming towards getting information technology spread throughout health care.

First thing is, they've got to have a language that kind of can talk between a hospital in Dublin and a hospital in Crawford, you know? Well, they don't have a hospital in Crawford. *[Laughter]* How about a hospital close to Crawford? *[Laughter]* And that's important, because there's a lot of different—the language needs to be standardized. And Mike's making pretty good progress on that.

And we're developing solutions for a nationwide health information network. One of the things I've insisted upon is that it's got to be secure and private. There's nothing more private than your own health records.

And so any system that works is one that is—it's your record; you decide the disclosure of your health records.

And let me give you an example about how such a system can work and what I'm trying to explain to you about how to help control costs and reduce medical errors. After Katrina hit, there was hundreds of veterans that had to be relocated. What's interesting is, is that the Veterans Department has already started this information technology modernization. There are medical—electronic medical records for veterans. And so when these poor folks got scattered around the country, the doctors and providers had access to the electronic records of our veterans.

So if a person had a diabetes issue, up pops on the screen the information, the latest test, the medicine being taken. It was an incredibly efficient way to make sure that the health care needs of our veterans were met during this time of catastrophe. It helped people fill out the prescription drugs of our seniors without fear of error. It helped a local doc say, "Well, gosh, look, you've been taking this medicine in the past; I'm going to prescribe it for you in the future, in order to make sure that your health care needs continue." If you have your own medical record, your own electronic medical record, and you get sick in a remote part of our country, people instantly see your blood type, the issues that you've faced in the past, really important information about you—about who you are and what you're going to need to help you.

And we're on our way to providing a nationwide information network. It's going to help save maybe 25 percent of the costs in medical care. I told you that one of the important things we've got to be worried about is how to deal with the cost-drivers, how to come up with ways to, practically, with a commonsense solution, deal with rising costs. One way is to modernize health care. Another way is to put consumers in charge of making decisions with transparency in pricing.

I want to talk a little bit about small businesses. Obviously, I've told you once and I really mean it, I understand how important small businesses are for the economy. I also love the thought of America being a great

place for entrepreneurship. There's nothing better than talking to somebody and saying, "I started my own business," or, "I own my own company." It's refreshing to me. It's just really an important part of the American experience. And obviously, as I mentioned, health care is a really important issue for small business. If you sat down with a round-table of small businesses, the first issue that comes to their mind is, "I can't provide health care for my people; how do you expect me to stay in business when health care costs are driving us out?" Well, HSAs help a lot, and I really urge American small businesses to take a look at HSAs. They're good for Wendy's; they'll be good for you as well.

Here's another idea: One of the problems that small businesses have is that they enter into the market—they're trying to provide traditional insurance without any risk pool behind them. If you've got three people you're trying to insure, it's a heck of a lot more expensive than if you're trying to insure 3,000 people or 10,000 people. In other words, the more people that are in the risk pool, the lower the cost of traditional insurance is for a small business. And so I look forward to working with the Congress to expand what we call associated health plans. That's kind of Washington-speak for allowing small firms to band together to buy insurance at the same discounts that big companies get.

I'll give you an example. You've got yourself a family restaurant here in Dublin, Ohio. They've got 10 employees, and you try to go in the marketplace, and it's prohibitively expensive. It seems to make sense to me that the family restaurant in Dublin ought to team up with family restaurants all across the country, so that the employees provide one big risk pool to help lower the cost for small businesses. It is a practical way of helping small businesses that choose not to go into HSAs to be able to buy traditional insurance in a cost-effective way.

The bill passed the House of Representatives; it remains stuck in the United States Senate. I urge the Senate—I urge the Senate, for the sake of affordable health care for small businesses and their employees, to pass associated health plans.

I'll talk about one other issue. I hope you're hanging in there with me here.

[*Laughter*] And that issue is one that I remember well when I was traveling your State, and that is the number of good docs that are getting driven out of practice because of frivolous lawsuits. If you're worried about affordability of health care and availability of health care, then you have got to be concerned about junk lawsuits. You just have to be, because a lot of docs and providers, thinking they're going to get sued, practice what's called defensive medicine. They order tests; they write prescriptions that simply are not necessary so they can protect themselves from being sued in a court of law by a trial lawyer. That's just a fact of life.

I find interesting a quote from an emergency physician here. Here's what this person said, "In an effort to reduce our malpractice exposure"—that means, in an effort not to get sued—"we're being encouraged to overtreat, overtest, and overadmit patients." It has to be driving medical costs right out of the roof, and it is. It is.

In order to address the rising cost of health care, we've got to have a rational liability system. If you're harmed, you ought to have your day in court. There ought to be justice for you, if you're injured. But we can write laws that make sure that you get your due claims without encouraging a plethora of junk lawsuits that is costing you a lot of money.

I'll tell you how it's costing you money. The cost of defensive medicine—in other words, practicing medicine that is otherwise not necessary—is estimated to cost our society \$60 to \$100 billion a year. It raises the cost of Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans Affairs, and other health programs by an estimated \$28 billion a year.

You're paying it. You're working hard. You're putting money into the—paying your taxes, and \$28 billion of those taxes goes to pay for the cost of frivolous and junk lawsuits. As equal—more importantly, in my judgment, actually, is that good docs are leaving the practice of medicine.

I said something in the State of the Union, and it's a startling statistic, if you really take time to think about it, and that is there are 1,500 counties in America without an ob-gyn. There are 15 counties in your State of Ohio

without an ob-gyn. Now, that isn't right. I mean, these are good docs who are involved with the precious—the delivery of precious life. And they're getting sued—a lot. And they're leaving the practice, and it's putting a lot of women in a bind. Women are having to travel miles. There's nothing worse than being—having uncertainty at this very important time of life.

And we need to do something about it, you know. I thought when I got to Washington it was a State issue, Governor. Now when I see the effect on the Federal budget of \$28 billion a year, it's a national issue. It requires a national response. The House of Representatives passed a good piece of legislation. The trial lawyers have got it stuck in the United States Senate. For the sake of affordable health care and available health care, for the sake of good health care for our women across the United States of America, we need medical liability reform this year.

So that's what I wanted to talk about—[*laughter*—ways to make health care more affordable and more available. I hope you can get a sense of my philosophy that when you trust the American people to make wise decisions about their health care, positive things happen. Free markets and competition transform our world. They have the power to transform our health care system. It's important to recognize—Wendy's recognized that when you introduced health savings accounts.

The agenda I just talked about, one I'm looking forward to working with both Democrats and Republicans in Congress, builds on the strengths of the private sector, recognizes what's good, and let's continue to build on that. It focuses on practical, market-based solutions. It offers the potential to deliver real improvements, genuine improvements in the lives of our fellow citizens.

The heart of the reform is that you got to trust the people of the United States of America. And I do. And I do. I want to thank you for giving me a chance to come by and visit with you. God bless you. God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:13 p.m. at Wendy's International, Inc. In his remarks, he referred to Jack Scheussler, chairman and chief executive officer, and Jeffrey Cava, executive vice



president of human resources and administration, Wendy's International, Inc.; Gov. Bob Taft of Ohio; Jon Husted, speaker, and Larry Flowers, majority leader, Ohio State House of Representatives; Bill Harris, president, and Steve Stivers, senator, Ohio State Senate; and Mayor Marilee Chinnici-Zuercher of Dublin, OH. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

### Remarks in a Discussion on Health Care Initiatives

February 16, 2006

**The President.** Thank you all. Thanks for the warm welcome. Thanks for coming. We're about to have a discussion about how this country can make sure our health care system is available and affordable. And I want to thank our panelists for joining us. It's an interesting way to describe and discuss policy; it's a lot better than me just getting up there and giving a speech—you don't have to nod. [*Laughter*]

Do you want to kick things off, Mark?

**Dr. Mark B. McClellan.** I'd be glad to. I'd like to welcome all of you to the Department of Health and Human Services. As you know, there are many people here who are working day and night to protect the public health, to help our health care system work better.

We have the privilege of working with the best health professionals in the world—doctors, nurses, others who have some great ideas about delivering better care and about finding ways to do it with fewer complications and at a much lower cost. But in many ways, our health care policies haven't kept up with what our health care system can do, and we're going to spend some time talking about that today.

So, Mr. President, we're very pleased to have you here today to lead this discussion of some new ideas for improving our health care.

**The President.** Thank you, Mark. Thanks, Mike Leavitt—where are you, Michael? Surely, he's here? [*Laughter*]

**Dr. McClellan.** He's in Florida, Mr. President.

**The President.** Oh, he's in Florida. Okay. Surfing. [*Laughter*] Actually, I saw him this

morning—now don't make excuses for him. He's doing a heck of a job—he really is—and I hope you enjoy working for him.

I am really pleased that Nancy Johnson is here. Madam Congresswoman, thank you for coming. If you want to meet somebody in Congress who knows something about health care, talk to Nancy; she is a tireless advocate for making sure the health care systems are efficient and compassionate. And I really want to thank you for coming. It's a joy to work with you on these big issues.

I thank all the folks here at HHS. Thank you for working hard on behalf of our fellow citizens. You've got a tough and important job, and you're doing it well. One of the reasons why is because, you know, we've clearly defined roles of Government—with the role of Government in health care. And one of the roles is to make sure our seniors have a modern, reformed Medicare system. And I want to thank those of you who are working on making sure that the Medicare system is explained to and available for seniors all across the country.

We did the right thing when it came to saying that if we're going to have a program for seniors, let's make sure it works as good as possible. And part of that meant modernizing the system so it included a prescription drug benefit. It's not easy to sign up millions of people in a quick period of time to a new program, and there were some glitches. The good thing about this Department, and the good thing about Mike and Mark is that they have prioritized problems to be fixed and have gone around the country fixing them.

Millions of folks—about 25 million people have signed up for the new Medicare benefit. I don't know if you remember when we first had the discussions about the Medicare benefit, people said, "It will cost about \$37 a month per beneficiary." One of the interesting reforms is not only making sure that medicine was modernized but seniors actually were given choices to make in the program. And Mark's done a fine job of encouraging providers to be in the markets. And as a result of choice in the marketplace, the average anticipated cost is \$27 a month.

In other words, giving people a decision to make is an important part of helping to keep control of cost. We have a third-party

system—third-party payer system. When somebody else pays the bills, rarely do you ask price or ask the cost of something. I mean, it seems kind of convenient, doesn't it? You pay your premium; you pay your copay; you pay your deductible; and somebody pays the bills for you.

The problem with that is, is that there's no kind of market force. There's no consumer advocacy for reasonable price when somebody else pays the bills. And one of the reasons why we're having inflation in health care is because there is no sense of market. We're addressing the cost-drivers of health care, and this discussion today is a part of helping to make sure health care is affordable. And as it becomes affordable, it becomes more available, by the way.

A couple of ideas, other than the subject at hand, to make sure health care is affordable is—and we'll talk a little bit about information technology. I know there's a great initiative here at HHS to help bring the health care industry into the modern era by implementing information technology reforms. And for those of you working on the project, thanks, and we take it very seriously at the White House, and I know you take it seriously here.

Secondly, I want to thank those of you who are working on community health centers. One way to help control costs is to help people who are poor and indigent get costs in places that are much more efficient at delivery of health than emergency rooms. And so we're committed to expansion of community health centers. Again, thanks on that, Nancy, for helping in Congress. They work. We're measuring results, and the results are good results.

Thirdly, lawsuits are running up the cost of medicine. The practice of—the defensive practice of medicine or the practice of defensive medicine—I'm a Texan—[*laughter*—it costs about 28 billion a year when doctors overprescribe, to make sure that they kind of inoculate themselves against lawsuit. It runs up Federal budgets. It costs the economy about 600 to 100 billion—60 to 100 billion a year.

And so we've got to do something about these junk lawsuits. I mean, they're running good people out of practice. I said a statistic

the other day in the State of the Union that's got to startle you if you're involved with the health care delivery in America: 1,500 counties don't have an ob-gyn because lawsuits have driven a lot of good docs out of those counties. And that's not right.

And so we've got to get medical liability reform. The House has done a good job of passing it. It's stuck in the Senate. So for the sake of affordable and available health care, is to get a good, decent bill passed.

One other way to help control costs is to interject market forces, as I mentioned. And one way to do that is through what's called health savings accounts. Health savings accounts are an innovative product that came, really, to be as a result of the Medicare bill that I was honored to sign. And they're an innovative account that combines savings on a tax-free basis with a catastrophic health care plan. We'll have some consumers here of health savings accounts that will describe how they work and whether or not they're working worth a darn.

But the key thing in a health savings account is, you actually put a patient in charge of his or her decisions, which we think is a vital aspect of making sure the health care system is not only modern, but a health care system in which costs are not running out of control. And part of making sure consumers, if they have a decision to make, can make rational decisions is for there to be transparency in pricing. In other words, how can you make a rational decision unless you fully understand the pricing options or the quality options. When you go buy a car, you know, you're able to shop and compare. And yet in health care, that's just not happening in America today.

And so one of the—this discussion is centered around encouraging consumer-based health care systems and strengthening private medicine through transparency and pricing and quality. And I hope you find this as interesting a discussion as I will.

I'm going to start off with Dr. Gail Wilensky. Do you know anything about health care? No. [*Laughter*] She knows a lot about health care. You've been working the health care industry for, what—tell us what you do.

[At this point, Dr. Gail Wilensky, senior fellow, Project HOPE, made brief remarks.]

**The President.** Thank you for the lead-in. We spend a lot of money at the Federal level, and you would expect that if we're sitting up here talking about transparency then we ought to do something about it. I mean, the Federal Government is the largest purchaser of health care—am I right—46 percent of all health care dollars.

**Dr. McClellan.** That's right.

**The President.** Okay. What are you going to do about it? [Laughter]

**Dr. McClellan.** Well, Mr. President, we are doing a lot about this already, as you know. Before the Medicare drug benefit, Medicare provided a drug discount card for millions of seniors to enable them to save billions of dollars. And with that card, we made available information on discounted drug prices for all the prescription drugs and all the pharmacies around the country. Seniors use that information to keep prices down. They shopped, and we saw during the course of this program, savings actually increase over time. We also saw lots of seniors switching to drugs that they found out about that could meet their medical needs at a much lower cost.

**The President.** One thing a person watching out there—what we're talking about, for example, when it comes to putting information out on drugs, a brand name drug and a generic drug do the same thing, but there's a huge price differential. And what Mark is saying is, is that we made, as a result of our Government policies, the providers to provide a shopping list, a comparison for people to get on the Internet and find out whether they can buy a drug cheaper or not.

**Dr. McClellan.** That's right. And many people are saving 70 or 80 percent or more on their drug cost by switching to generics. You can get this information on the Internet. You can also get it by calling 1-800-MEDICARE. And we're doing the same thing with the drug benefit. And that's one reason the drug benefit costs now are so much lower than people expected, as you mentioned earlier.

We're trying to make more information available on hospital quality, on nursing home quality, on many other aspects of

health care. But we can't do this alone; we've got a public/private health care system, so we need to work with health professionals, with consumer groups, with business purchasers, and with the health plans in this country to get useful information out. We started to do that through collaborative efforts, like the Hospital Quality Alliance and the Ambulatory Care Quality Alliance. These are groups that include all of the different key stakeholders in our health care system working together to make useful information available on quality and cost.

Some of that's happened already, but I think with the leadership from the President and with the full backing of the Federal Government, we can move this effort along much more quickly and much more extensively to get information out about satisfaction with care; to get information out about outcomes of care and complications; and to get information out about cost. And, Mr. President, we're very pleased to be starting right now a new program that will be piloted in six large communities around the country, where all these different groups—the health professionals, business groups, Government organizations, including Medicare and the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, and health plans—are going to be working together to make useful information available to consumers and health professionals in these communities about the quality and costs of their health care. And hopefully, we'll be able to move this project along very, very quickly.

**The President.** Good.

**Dr. McClellan.** We're working.

**The President.** Nice going. Yes, I know you are. You're working hard. Mark also has been responsive to some of the issues of the Medicare rollout. And they've been moving hard and traveling around the State. And thanks for responding to what's going to end up being a really, really important program for our seniors—let me say, a revitalized, important program for our seniors. It's going to make a big difference. Thanks for working so hard.

Robin Downey. What do you do, Robin?

**Roberta "Robin" Downey.** I'm head of product development for Aetna.

**The President.** Yes.

**Ms. Downey.** And I was instrumental in launching our HSA program. We've been doing consumer-directed plans since 2002. And so we're the first national plan to offer an HSA in the health plan arena.

**The President.** Good move. I bet you're really selling a lot of them.

**Ms. Downey.** Yes, we are. The adoption is higher in the HSA than it is in the HRA now. It's increasing, and I'm probably one of Aetna's first members in the HSA.

**The President.** You and I both. We own an HSA.

**Ms. Downey.** Yes, yes, both in it.

**The President.** Let me ask you something. Aetna, obviously, is a big health insurance company. Do you—obviously you've got an opinion on transparency, otherwise you wouldn't be sitting here—but give us from your perspective, from the insurance company's perspective, tell us what transparency means to you and how best we can work together to implement the transparency.

[Ms. Downey, vice president and head of product development, Aetna, made brief remarks.]

**The President.** Good. And I presume there was resistance at first?

**Ms. Downey.** Not resistance; they wanted to know why. I think physicians are wondering why the consumers need that kind of information. So they're getting used to that. And then they were actually pretty helpful when we were talking about how we were going to display it. They were saying, make it easy for the patients to understand, so they're helping us take the medical terminology, put it into layman's terms. They wanted to make sure it wasn't going to create more work for them; were people going to be calling their offices constantly. And that's what we want to do; we want to put it on the web site so they don't have to constantly call. So we want to provide easy access.

And so they were also concerned with, if you put cost information there, and you don't have quality, then people will price shop on cost alone, and they're very afraid of that—and they should be, because people should understand the——

**The President.** So how do you handle that?

**Ms. Downey.** We're marrying that now. We're going to expand that pilot. It was so successful, we're going to expand it into more locations in the fall of 2006, and we're going to be marrying that information with the quality information so the consumer can go out and see what the unit cost is, what the efficiency is, what the clinical quality is. And so they can look at the overall value. We're pretty pumped about it.

**The President.** Well, I appreciate you doing it. It must be exciting to be on the leading edge of an interesting innovation and to a—into health care. It's hard to believe that ours is a market society in which people are able to shop based upon price and quality in almost every aspect of our life, with the exception of health care. And it's no wonder that we're dealing with what appears to be ever-increasing costs.

You know, it's really interesting, LASIK surgery is a good example of a procedure that was really—was not a part of a third-party payer, just came to be. People could choose it if they wanted to choose it, could pay for it if they didn't want to—would pay for it themselves if they chose to use it. And more doctors started offering LASIK surgery. There was more information about LASIK surgery, and the price came down dramatically over time, and the quality was increasing. And now LASIK surgery is eminently affordable for a lot of people, because the market actually functioned. And I think what Robin is saying is that they're trying to introduce those same kind of forces in Cincinnati.

Thanks for doing what you're doing. I met with your old boss today. Maybe he's watching out there. [Laughter]

**Ms. Downey.** He talks to me just the way you talk to Mark—"just do it." [Laughter]

**The President.** A little bossy. [Laughter]

**Ms. Downey.** But you get stuff done.

**The President.** Yes, that's right.

Dan Evans is the president and CEO of Clarion Health Partners in Indianapolis, Indiana. Thanks for coming. You're doing some interesting things. He's a hospital guy.

**Daniel F. Evans, Jr.** I'm the CEO of an academic medical center, so we have both a university and a hospital. We have 4,000 peer review projects ongoing right now, including——

**The President.** Tell everybody what a peer review project is.

[*Mr. Evans, president and chief executive officer, Clarian Health Partners, Inc., made brief remarks.*]

**The President.** So how easy is it to establish a matrix, or a—information for consumers to be able to really accurately understand?

[*Mr. Evans made further remarks.*]

**The President.** We're really talking about making sure each American has an electronic medical record, over which he or she has got control of the privacy. An interesting—another example was what happened—the Veterans Administration, by the way, has implemented electronic medical records. In other words, they're using modern technology to bring this important agency into the 21st century. A lot of files at your hospital still—probably not your hospital but the typical hospital—are handwritten.

**Mr. Evans.** Well, you know, what happens is, they may be electronic in the hospital, but handwritten in the doctor's office—

**The President.** Yes, and the doctors can't write anyways. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Evans.** Well, the pen is a very dangerous thing.

**The President.** Yes, it is.

**Mr. Evans.** Yes, as you well know. [*Laughter*]

**The President.** And so the idea is to modernize doctors' offices and hospitals and providers through information technology. And so the Veterans Department has done this. In other words, each veteran has got an electronic medical record. And so when Katrina hit, a lot of veterans were scattered, and they were just displaced. And you can imagine the trauma to begin with, and the trauma is compounded if you're worried about your record being lost somewhere, your medical record.

And fortunately, because the veterans at the Department had already acted, these medical records went with the patient, and a lot of veterans got instant help. And so a doc could, you know, kind of download their record, take a look at what was prescribed before, take a look at other procedures, and boom, the medicine and the help was

brought up to speed quickly, which is great. And I want to thank you for doing that.

Information technology is going to help change medicine in a constructive way, and it does dovetail with price and equality.

Getting kind of adrift of what we're talking about here? I hope so. If not, we'll go over to Jerry; she'll help—[*laughter*]. Jerry, welcome. Where do you live? What do you do?

**Jerry W. Henderson.** Mr. President, I live in Baltimore, Maryland.

**The President.** Welcome.

**Ms. Henderson.** And I am a nurse, and I've been in health care for over 30 years. And for the last 9 years, I've had the responsibility of running an ambulatory surgery center in Baltimore.

**The President.** Good. Called?

**Ms. Henderson.** The SurgiCenter of Baltimore.

**The President.** Very good. And tell us, you know, the transparency issue—we had a little visit ahead of time, so it's not the first time I've seen her; she gave me a little hint about what she was going to talk about. Go ahead and share with people—small clinic, relatively small clinic, big hospital guy, small clinic person.

[*Ms. Henderson, executive director, SurgiCenter of Baltimore, made brief remarks.*]

**The President.** Right. And the reason why they can't yet is because you happen to be on the leading edge of what is an important reform.

**Ms. Henderson.** I think so.

**The President.** Yes, it is. Well, so do the patients, more importantly. And thank you for sharing that with us.

You happen to have a patient here.

**Ms. Henderson.** I do.

**The President.** You've known Gail before?

**Ms. Henderson.** Gail Zanelotti was a patient at our center, and I think she'll tell you that probably it was a more convenient and comfortable and patient—

**The President.** You're not putting words in her mouth are you? [*Laughter*]

**Ms. Henderson.** No, no. But I bet she would tell you that. [*Laughter*]

**Gail Zanelotti.** It was more convenient and comfortable. [Laughter]

**The President.** It was? Very good. [Laughter]

**Ms. Henderson.** See? [Laughter]

**The President.** You were diagnosed with what?

**Ms. Zanelotti.** With bilateral breast cancer in October. And I had several procedures performed at the Surgical Center of Baltimore. And they treated me as if I were the main event. That's how I felt—socially, emotionally, physically. The whole gamut was covered. And I chose the surgeon first for quality and then went on to find the pricing and everything else through them, which they were very transparent about. It was a very positive experience. And I'm still in communication with them because—through the reconstructive process. And I would do it the same way again.

**The President.** And so how does—I mean, so you're the consumer. You walk in, obviously, pretty well traumatized to a certain extent. You've got this horrible disease that's attacked you. And you come to them, and they—and you're asking what questions?

**Ms. Zanelotti.** I saw the surgeon that night, and I think we were there at 10:30 p.m. at night.

**The President.** Oh, great.

**Ms. Zanelotti.** I mean, it's amazing how dedicated some of these doctors are. And then they take you through the process of different diagnostic steps that you have to take. And really, you see how curable things can be if it's caught early. And I was very lucky to be able to be faced with step-by-step approach to get back to my journey of full health.

**The President.** Good job. Congratulations.

**Ms. Zanelotti.** Thank you.

**The President.** You've got that sparkle in your eye, you know. [Laughter]

**Ms. Zanelotti.** Thank you. Very lucky.

**The President.** And so—no, I appreciate it. It's an interesting—the transparency reform is going to take place in both large entities and smaller entities, because consumers shouldn't be restricted to shopping only in a large entity or a small entity. "Shopping" isn't the right word, but you know what I

mean—in other words, out there looking for the procedure that fits their needs at the right cost and the right price.

It almost doesn't matter if we have transparency if consumers, however, are not in a position to make decisions. In other words, if somebody is making the decision for you, transparency only matters to the decider.

And so Bruce is with us today—Bruce Goodwin. He's an HSA owner. Bruce, describe HSAs—well, first of all, tell us what you do.

**William "Bruce" Goodwin.** My company manufactures computer plate technology for the graphic arts printing business.

**The President.** How many employees?

**Mr. Goodwin.** We have 20 employees. We're a small company.

**The President.** Yes. By the way, two-thirds of new jobs in America are created by small businesses. And if a small business can't afford health care, it's pretty likely they're not going to be aggressive in expanding. And I presume you have some health care issues.

**Mr. Goodwin.** Well, I'm here as an employer who is concerned about health care costs for sure, and a strong advocate of health savings accounts. I'm a firm believer that for employers, health savings accounts is probably the best weapon we've got in the battle of these rapidly escalating health care costs. And I'm very much hopeful, and I appreciate very much your leadership in trying to help strengthen the health savings accounts.

**The President.** Yes, we'll talk about it in a minute. So tell people what a health savings account is. This is kind of a foreign language to everybody but the 3 million people who own one. It's just a new product. It's just beginning to happen.

[Mr. Goodwin, president, Glunz and Jensen, Inc., made brief remarks.]

**The President.** An insurance plan with a health savings account is a high-deductible catastrophic plan coupled with a tax-free health savings account to pay routine medical costs up to the deductible. That's the way they're structured now. Many employees—I was at Wendy's yesterday; Wendy's has now

got 9,000 employees using health savings accounts. The company pays for part of the premium, as well as the contribution into the cash account to be paid by the customer for routine medical expenses.

If you don't spend all your money in your cash account, you can save it tax-free, and roll it over to the next year, and then you contribute again. Wendy's premiums rose this year, I think, at less than 2 percent—maybe even less than 1 percent, if I'm not mistaken. And they were increasing at double-digit rates—I hope I'm not exaggerating—they were going up quite dramatically, let me put it to you that way. And now their premiums were significantly lower. And the savings enabled them to put additional money into their employees' accounts, additional contributions.

It's an interesting concept, because all of a sudden, it puts an individual in charge of health care decisions. There's an incentive, by the way, for people to make rational choices about what they consume—like, if you don't smoke and drink, it's more likely you'll stay healthy and not spend money in your account. If you exercise—I'd strongly urge mountain biking—[laughter]—it helps you stay healthy. And by staying healthy, you actually save money. There's a remuneration for good choice.

And what Bruce is saying is that it's helped his business afford health care. It's helped a lot of small businesses. If you're a small-business owner, please look into health savings accounts for the good of your employees.

Interestingly enough, about a third of those who've purchased the new health savings accounts were uninsured. Many of the uninsured in America are young people, kind of the bulletproof syndrome—you're never going to get sick, so therefore, why buy insurance. Now, there's an incentive to buy insurance because it means you can save tax-free.

And so Bruce has used them—and he reports that he's able to better control his costs, which is really important for the small-business sector. And it's also important for the large-business sector to say to their employees, "Here is something that's really beneficial for you and your families because when you save the money, it's your money." Savings in health care doesn't go to a third party

entity; it goes to the consumer. It's a new concept that's just coming in to be.

In order for it to work, there has to be transparency. How can you expect somebody to make rational decisions in the marketplace if they don't see price and quality? It's going to be a very important—what we're talking here is a very important reform to really fit into a—making sure the private medicine aspect of our medical system remains the center of medicine.

There's a debate here in Washington about who best to make decisions. Some up here believe the Federal Government should be making decisions on behalf of people. I believe that consumers should be encouraged to make decisions on behalf of themselves. And health savings accounts and transparency go hand in hand.

There are some things we need Congress to do to make health savings accounts work even better than they are. One is to make sure that one's contributions into the health savings account is—can be—will be equal to the deductible, plus any copays that may have to be made. In other words, we shouldn't cap the contribution, cash contribution at where it is; it needs to be raised.

Secondly, we need to make sure the Tax Code treats employees in large companies and employees in small companies equally when it comes to purchasing health savings accounts. And thirdly, and a key component of making sure health savings accounts works, that addresses one of the real concerns in our society, and that is people changing jobs but fearful of losing health care as they do change jobs, is to make sure health savings accounts are portable in all aspects, a health care plan that encompasses health savings accounts. Today, the rules enable one to take with them the cash balances in their health savings accounts but not the insurance in their health savings accounts. In order to make these plans truly portable, so as to bring peace of mind to people, we've got to make sure that health savings accounts are genuinely portable accounts.

I look forward to working with Congress to strengthen, not weaken, but strengthen these very important products that puts the doctor and the patient in the center of the health care decision. Today we've heard

some interesting, innovative ideas that are taking place from the insurance industry to the providers to the Federal Government. And we will continue to implement transparency. And it's just the beginning. And I predict that when this—as this society becomes more transparent, as the consumers have more choice to make, you'll see better cost containment. And as we're able to contain costs, we achieve some great national objectives: One is to make sure health care is affordable, and two, make sure it's available.

I want to thank you all for coming to join us. It was an interesting discussion. Appreciate your time. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:18 p.m. in the Great Hall at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

### Remarks Following Discussions With President Alvaro Uribe of Colombia and an Exchange With Reporters

February 16, 2006

**President Bush.** Thank you all for coming. The President and I will make a statement. We'll be glad to take two questions per side.

Mr. President, *bienvenidos*. I'm glad you're here.

First of all, the President and I are friends, and we are personal friends, and we're friends of freedom as well. Every time I visit with President Uribe, I am impressed by his strength of character and his belief in the future of his country. Mr. President, I'm proud that you're here. I want to thank you for the wide-ranging discussions we have had.

The President, of course, has got trade on his mind. I've explained to him very carefully that we are interested in a trade agreement that we will negotiate in good faith. The agreement must be good for the people of Colombia, as well as the people of the United States. And I assured him that our trade negotiators will be fair in our approach.

So, Mr. President, thank you for your strength of character, and thank you for your friendship. And welcome here to the Oval Office.

**President Uribe.** President Bush, this meeting has been very constructive, as it always is whenever we meet. I want to thank you; I want to thank the Government; and I want to thank the Congress and the people of the United States for their permanent interest in Colombia.

Our peoples have a relationship that is historic, and it's also a relationship that is close. We also have a convergence, a convergence that is based on democratic values and the belief that democracy needs security in order to build those values.

We have been negotiating an FTA for the last 23 months. All of us have come to this negotiation in good faith, and I'm sure that we will see a conclusion. This meeting has been good for democracy, and it has been good for the interests of our people, as well as for our shared war on terror and our war against the drugs that finance that terror.

Thank you.

**President Bush.** I understood you. [Laughter]

**President Uribe.** Thank you.

**President Bush.** Nedra [Nedra Pickler, Associated Press].

### Vice President's Hunting Accident

**Q.** Yes, Mr. President, do you feel it was appropriate that the Vice President didn't reveal his shooting accident until the next day, and through a private citizen? And do you think it was okay that he didn't talk to you about it, personally, until Monday?

**President Bush.** I thought the Vice President handled the issue just fine. He went through—and I thought his explanation yesterday was a powerful explanation. This is a man who likes the outdoors, and he likes to hunt. And he heard a bird flush, and he turned and pulled the trigger and saw his friend get wounded. And it was a deeply traumatic moment for him, and obviously for the—it was a tragic moment for Harry Whittington.

And so I thought his explanation yesterday was a very strong and powerful explanation, and I'm satisfied with the explanation he gave.

**Q.** But are you satisfied about the timing?

**President Bush.** I'm satisfied with the explanation he gave.



Mr. President is about to ask somebody to ask a question.

concern is for Harry, and I know the Vice President feels the same way.

#### **Colombia-U.S. Free Trade Agreement**

**Q.** Mr. President, is there going to be a free trade agreement with Colombia or not?

**President Bush.** *Espero que si.*

**Q.** Pronto? Soon?

**President Bush.** *Vamos a ver.* I spent time visiting with the President about the progress on negotiations. Free trade agreements are never easy to negotiate—*es muy dificil*—and because—there's interests. He represents the people of your country very well. He's a good negotiator, as is his trade minister. They're strong in representing the interests of the people, whether they be farmers or manufacturers. And our people are good, strong negotiators, too.

I'm very hopeful. I'm very hopeful we reach a conclusion. Trade agreements are never easy, and that's what's very important to understand. But in my judgment—and by the way, I, too, have to convince the American people of the importance of trade agreements—in my judgment an agreement with this important country, Colombia, will be a very important agreement. And so we're working hard.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

#### **Vice President's Hunting Accident**

**Q.** Some Democrats say that this shooting episode has contributed to a perception of White House secrecy. What do you say to that, sir?

**President Bush.** I think people are making the wrong conclusion about a tragic accident. The Vice President was involved in a terrible accident, and it profoundly affected him. Yesterday when he was here in the Oval Office, I saw the deep concern he had about a person who he wounded. And he—again, I thought yesterday's explanation was a very strong and important explanation to make to the American people.

And now our concerns are directed toward the recovery of our friend. I knew Harry Whittington when I was the Governor of Texas, down there in Austin. He's a fine man. He's been involved in our State's politics for a long period of time. And, you know, my

#### **Colombia-U.S. Free Trade Agreement**

**Q.** President Bush, do you think the negotiators are making the link between the fact that it's important to prove legal economy as a way to fight against terror and illegal drugs?

**President Bush.** That's a great question. I believe that when we work together in a free trade, it strengthens markets and the appreciation for open markets, whether it be in Colombia or here at home. I believe free commerce between nations will enable countries—people in countries to realize their full potential. I think one of the things that's very important—I know the President is dedicated on—is a strategy on the one hand that says, he will deal harshly with those who deal in drugs. But he also recognizes there needs to be economic activity to compete.

We've had a lot of discussions about crop substitution and microloans for people to be able to develop ways to make a living that is distinct from and different from being involved in the drug trade.

And so absolutely we understand the connection between trade of legal products in a free way between nations as a way to compete against illegal activities. I appreciate the President's leadership on working hard to make sure that Colombia is rid of narcotrafficking. It's a great country, with a wonderful history. And the determination to rid the country of narcotrafficking will go down as a very important part of your nation's history, and we'll continue to say that Colombia is a great country with great enterprise and great hope and great opportunity.

So thank you for coming. *Adios.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:16 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Harry Whittington, chairman, Texas Funeral Service Commission, who was injured on February 11 while hunting with the Vice President on a ranch in Corpus Christi, TX; and Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism Jorge Humberto Botero of Colombia. President Uribe spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

**Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives Transmitting a Request for Fiscal Year 2006 Supplemental Appropriations for Ongoing Military and Intelligence Operations and Selected Other International Activities**

*February 16, 2006*

*Dear Mr. Speaker:*

Today, I am submitting a request for Fiscal Year 2006 supplemental appropriations of \$72.4 billion for ongoing military and intelligence operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and selected other international activities. These funds support U.S. Armed Forces and Coalition partners as we advance democracy, fight the terrorists and insurgents, and train and equip Iraqi security forces so that they can defend their sovereignty and freedom. Already more than 35 Iraqi battalions have assumed control of their own areas of responsibility. This request provides the resources necessary to continue that effort so the Coalition can continue to hand over control of more territory to Iraqi forces.

In Afghanistan, our Armed Forces continue to track down terrorists, help the Afghan people rebuild their country, and train and equip Afghan security forces so that Afghanistan may continue to take control of its democratic future. Our coalition has trained many thousands of Afghan soldiers and police. These forces are risking their lives to fight our common enemy. This request provides the resources necessary to continue the train and equip effort so Afghan forces can eventually provide for the security of their own citizens.

The request includes funds to confront the threat from Improvised Explosive Devices and to improve the protection of our forces. In addition, the request addresses the need for substantial investment to repair or replace equipment worn out or lost in military operations. It also provides additional funding to cover the costs of restructuring the Army and Marine Corps into more agile, self-sustaining units that provide increased combat effectiveness critical to winning the Global War on Terror.

The request includes bonuses and incentive pay to properly compensate American troops for the sacrifices they make in defense of freedom. It also includes funds to cover enhanced benefits for survivors of all military members and provides for newly authorized benefits for those injured in combat.

The request also provides funds for the extraordinary security and operating costs associated with supporting U.S. diplomatic activity in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The request includes funds to help create political and economic stability in post-conflict areas, help Iraqis protect and sustain their infrastructure, and build Iraqi capacity at the national and provincial levels for better, more responsive, and transparent governance. The request also supports the successful Commander's Emergency Response program that enables military commanders to respond to urgent, small-scale, humanitarian relief and reconstruction needs in their area of responsibility. These counter-insurgency and stabilization activities help build civilian capabilities to ensure the transition to greater Iraqi self-reliance. Coupling increased civilian capacity with increased military capacity is essential to sustained progress in all realms—security, political, and economic—and is essential to neutralizing the insurgents and defeating the terrorists.

Finally, the supplemental requests funds for urgent, unanticipated needs to help relieve human suffering associated with a number of humanitarian crises, including Sudan and other parts of Africa, assistance for refugees, and the costs of humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts in response to the devastating earthquake in Pakistan. The request also includes funding to address urgent democracy-promotion activities in Iran.

I hereby designate the specific proposals in the amounts requested herein as emergency requirements. This request reflects urgent and essential requirements. I ask the Congress to appropriate the funds as requested and promptly send the bill to me for signature. The details of the request are set forth in the enclosed letter from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely,

**George W. Bush**

**Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives Transmitting a Request for Additional Funds To Support Recovery Efforts in the Gulf Coast**

*February 16, 2006*

*Dear Mr. Speaker:*

Hurricane Katrina was one of the worst natural disasters in our Nation's history. Katrina devastated an area roughly the size of Great Britain. This devastation has required an unprecedented response by Federal, State, and local governments, as well as the private sector. So far, the Federal Government has committed more than \$87 billion in spending and \$8 billion in tax relief for the people of the Gulf Coast and New Orleans.

To provide additional resources to assist the region in its recovery, I ask the Congress to consider the enclosed requests, totaling \$19.8 billion. This request includes critical funding to: replenish the Department of Homeland Security's Disaster Relief Fund in support of ongoing response efforts; support the Small Business Administration's Disaster Loan program; provide funding for the Community Development Block Grant program to support Louisiana's flood mitigation plans; achieve my commitment through the Corps of Engineers for stronger and better levee protection for New Orleans; and continue rebuilding of the region's Federal infrastructure.

I urge the Congress to act expeditiously on this request to ensure that the Federal response and recovery efforts continue uninterrupted. I designate this proposal in the amount requested herein as an emergency requirement.

The details of this request are set forth in the enclosed letter from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely,

**George W. Bush**

**Remarks on the War on Terror and a Question-and-Answer Session in Tampa, Florida**

*February 17, 2006*

**The President.** Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. Thanks for the warm weather. [*Laughter*] It's nice to be back here. I just came from MacDill, where I was talking to General Abizaid and General Brown, and one of the things that's clear is folks there at MacDill really do appreciate the support that the citizens of the communities of Tampa and St. Pete and the surrounding area provide them. So I want to thank you all very much for being—[*applause*].

I'd like to share some thoughts with you and then answer questions as time allows, if you've got any. First, I send Laura's greetings. She's doing great, by the way. She's a fantastic First Lady and—[*applause*]. She's obviously got to be a woman of enormous patience. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate Congressmen Adam Putnam, Bill Young, Mike Bilirakis, and Katherine Harris for being here today. Oh, there they are, yes. Proud to give them a ride on Air Force One. [*Laughter*] Some of them aren't going back, by the way. [*Laughter*] Mark Kennedy—is Mark here with us, from Minnesota? I think he was going to drop by—he supposedly was going to be here. You don't know him because he's from Minnesota, but I do, and he's a fine guy. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank my buddy Mel Sembler, Ambassador Sembler, who represented our country so well, once in Australia under 41, and then to Italy under 43—and Betty. I want to thank the Chambers of both Tampa and St. Pete. I want to thank the mayors from Tampa and St. Pete—Mayor Iorio and Mayor Baker are with us. Thank you both for coming. Appreciate you being here.

I didn't mean to take you away from your work. Any excuse is a good one on Friday, right? [*Laughter*] So long as I keep the speech short. I want to thank members of the statehouse who are here. I want to thank you all for letting us use this beautiful facility. And thank you for coming.

First of all, the economy is in good shape; it's growing. I guess that's an easy thing to say in the State of Florida, when the unemployment rate is 3.3 percent. Pretty amazing, isn't it? I'm sure the Governor is going to try to take credit for it, you know. *[Laughter]* I'm not going to because the role of Government is to create an environment where the entrepreneurs can flourish and small businesses can grow.

And the fundamental question facing this country of ours is, how do we keep ourselves to be the economic leader of the world? It's really an interesting question. You know, in spite of the good economic numbers—4.7 percent unemployment around the country; our economy growing at over 3 percent, in the face of hurricanes as well as high gas prices; homeownership is an alltime high; small businesses are growing. In spite of all that, there's a certain sense of uncertainty. People are worried. They're worried because they're changing jobs a lot. They're worried because of competition from India and China. There's a certain sense of uncertainty.

And so we have a choice to make about our economy: Do we retreat in the face of uncertainty, or do we lead? And I will be working with the Congress, Members from both political parties, to be the leader of the world. And here's some ideas. One, keep taxes low. We can't be the economic leader of the world if we run up your taxes, and so we're going to keep them low.

And you'll hear a debate in Washington, DC, that says, "Well, we've got to run up your taxes to balance the budget." That's not the way it works in Washington. They will run up your taxes, and they'll figure out new ways to spend money. The best way to balance the budget is to keep the taxes low and be wise about how we spend your money. That's how we're going to balance the budget.

In order for us to be competitive and lead in the world, we've got to get off of Middle Eastern oil. I know it shocks some of you to hear a Texan say, "We're addicted to oil." And we are, and it's a problem. It's a problem. It's a national security problem, and it's an economic security problem to be reliant upon oil from parts of the world that may be unstable or parts of the world that simply

don't like us. And so the best way to deal with that is to continue to foster new technologies because of research and development that will enable us to use different fuels in our cars, for example.

There's Kennedy right there. Good to see you, Kennedy. The reason I thought of him is because he's from a part of the world that's growing a lot of crops that can be converted into energy. We're close. We're close to technological breakthroughs that will enable us to convert wood chips and saw grass. We already convert sugar, corn, and soy into fuel. And think about that. If this technology comes true, which we believe it will, then pretty soon a President is going to say, "We're growing a lot of crops, and we're less dependent on Middle Eastern oil." There are 4.5 million cars today that are flex-fuel cars that can either run on gasoline or ethanol. In other words, the technology is available inside the automobile. And it's coming.

And we're making some great breakthroughs on battery technology. Next week I'm going to travel around the country going to some of the most innovative places around our country that are providing new technologies to enable us to become less dependent on oil, which will keep us a leader in the world.

Another thing we need to do is to make sure that our health care system is modern. I want to talk real quick about Medicare here. First of all, I'm aware there's a lot of seniors in this State that rely upon Medicare. The Federal Government made a commitment to the seniors around the United States, starting with Lyndon Baines Johnson, that we would provide good health care to the seniors. And when I got to Washington, I found that we were not providing modern medicine. I mean, we would provide the money for ulcer surgery in old Medicare, but not the prescription drugs necessary to prevent the ulcer from happening in the first place. And that didn't seem to make sense to me. It's an old, centralized system that was not modern and was not fulfilling the promise we made.

And so I worked with Congress—Republicans and Democrats—to get a new bill out of Congress that said, "We're going to provide a prescription drug benefit, and as we

do, we're going to give seniors more choices and more options from which to choose."

About 25 million seniors have signed up for this new plan since January 1st. That's a lot of folks in a quick period of time. And needless to say, when you make that kind of transition to a modern system, there's going to be some glitches. And our job is to fix those glitches. And that's what the Department of Health and Human Services under Mike Leavitt is doing. And it's important for our seniors to take advantage of this new program. Call 1-800-Medicare. Or if you've got a mom or a dad who's eligible for Medicare, sit down with them and explain the new benefit. It is a really good deal for America's seniors.

To make sure that health care works, we'll continue to take care of the poor. In other words, the Government has made a commitment to the elderly and the poor, but the Government has also got to understand, the best medicine is private medicine. And we should not get in between the doctors and the patients in America.

Finally, I want to spend a little time on education, briefly. First of all, No Child Left Behind Act is working. It's a piece of legislation that says, "We're going to raise the standards for every child, and we're going to measure to make sure children are meeting those standards." Can you imagine—you might remember the old—well, I'll tell you. When I was Governor of Texas, we had a system that didn't measure right early on. And guess what happened? We just shuffled kids through the system who couldn't read, and we found out too late. And that is a terrible system. It lets people down. And we're spending a lot of your money. It seems like to me, it makes sense to say, when we spend your money, we ought to insist upon results. Results are good for the taxpayers; more importantly, they're good for the students. So now we measure early, before it's too late, and we're correcting problems, before they're too late. And our kids are learning to read.

And we need to apply that same rigor to children in math and science, particularly in junior high. Fourth grade tests, our kids are doing fine compared to other countries. But there's a big drop-off when it comes to math

and—mathematics, particularly in junior high. And so we need to apply that same standard. We'll measure in junior high, and if you need help, we'll provide it for you. And the reason why is, the jobs of the 21st century are going to require mastery in math and science and engineering. And if we don't make—and if we don't educate our kids, the jobs are going to go elsewhere, whether we like it or not. So to make sure America remains the leader in the world, we're going to stay on the leading edge of research and development, and educate the young scientists of tomorrow, today.

And so, look, my attitude about the future is this, when it comes to the economy, and when it comes to foreign policy: We shouldn't fear it; let's shape the future. Let's be the leader tomorrow that we are today.

Now, we're living in historic times when you think about this world we're in. It is a time of challenge, and it's a time of opportunity. We've got the challenge to protect the American people. My most important duty is to protect you from harm. And we have an opportunity to lay the foundation of peace for generations to come.

I make a lot of decisions. My buddies in Texas, when they show up to Washington, after they get over the initial surprise that I'm still there—[laughter]—or got there in the first place—[laughter]—say, "Like, what's it like, you know? What is the job description? What's it like to be President?" And the best way to answer it is, I make a lot of decisions. And part of the reason's—my thinking was shaped on September the 11th, let me put it to you that way. And I think it's important for you to understand how the President thinks and why I make decisions I make, particularly decisions relating to war and peace.

I knew we're at war when they attacked us. As a matter of fact, I was down here in Florida. It didn't take long to figure out what was going on. And I vowed that day that I would not rest, so long as I was the President, in protecting the people. So a lot of my decisionmaking is based upon the attack. And I know we're at war, see—I knew it then, and the enemy has, unfortunately, proved me right because they continue to attack. In order to win the war against the enemy,

you've got to understand the nature of the enemy.

First of all, these people are coldblooded killers, people who will kill the innocent in order to achieve a tactical objective and a strategic objective. They have no conscience. You can't negotiate with these people. You cannot reason with them. You must bring them to justice.

Secondly, they have an ideology; they believe in something. The best way to describe what they believe in is to think about what life was like in Afghanistan under the Taliban. These were people that saw to it that young girls didn't get educated. If you didn't agree with their view of religion, you were whipped in the public square. They tolerated no dissent, no different point of view—tearing down the—destroying the culture from the past. They had no sense of history other than their dim view of history. That's what they think.

And they have made it clear their objectives. You probably have read some of Zawahiri's writings, admonitions to his fellow fighters. They've made it clear that they believe the United States is soft and weak and that they can shake our will. They've made it clear that it's just a matter of time before we vacate parts of the world which they can then occupy in order to be able to plan, plot attacks against the United States of America. They have made it clear they're interested in weapons of mass destruction. In other words, they've laid out a strategy, you know, for the world to see.

And my job is to take that strategy seriously. My job is to see the world the way it is, not the way some would hope it would be. If 9/11 affected our thinking, then we've got to make sure when the enemy speaks, we take every single sentence that they say seriously and deal with it. And that's what we're doing.

So I want to share some of the strategy in winning this war on terror. Make no mistake about it: We're going to win the war on terror. We'll protect the American people.

First, when we see threats, we've got to deal with them. When I was growing up in west Texas, oceans protected us. You might remember some of those days. Old Mayor Martinez, I know he remembers those days

when we felt pretty comfortable here in America. We could see a threat overseas, but oceans made it pretty clear that—to a lot of folks—that nothing would happen, you know. September 11th came along and made it clear that we are vulnerable, that the enemy can hit us if they want to.

And therefore, when you see a threat, you've got to deal with it. You can't take things for granted anymore. The best way to deal with this enemy is to defeat them overseas so we don't have to face them here at home, and to stay on the hunt. And that's what we're doing.

And we've got a coalition of countries. I spent a lot of time reminding people about the nature of the war. Listen, the tendency for folks is to say, "Well, this really isn't a war." I can understand that. Who wants to walk around thinking there's a war about to hit us. I mean, that's my job to worry about it, not yours. How can you have an economy recover from a recession if people are afraid to risk capital because they're worried about thinking something is going to happen? And the same thing happens overseas. People kind of want to slip to the comfortable. They don't believe it's a war, some of them, and I understand that. And so we spend a lot of time reminding people that we've got to work together because the enemy can't stand what we stand for, and that's freedom. They just hate freedom. And so we've got a good coalition, and we're on the hunt. We're keeping the pressure on them. It's hard to plot and plan and execute attacks when you're on the run.

And so the first step of our strategy is defeat them there so we don't have to face them here. And we've got some great special forces. I met the special forces command guy here—and there's great intelligence officers and wonderful coalition folks. We're cutting off their money. It makes it kind of hard to operate when you can't get your bank accounts full of money in order to—we're just doing a lot of stuff. And it's important for citizens to know that there's a constant, constant pressure. I think about it every day.

And we're making progress. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, September the 11th plotter-planner, is incarcerated; his successor brought to justice. Slowly but surely, we're

finding them where they hide, and they know we're on their trail.

Secondly, we got to deny them safe haven. These people can't operate without safe haven. It's an interesting war we're in. It's totally different from what we're used to because we're not facing nation-states; we're dealing with an enemy that is international in nature, that hides in states.

When the President says something like, "If you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist," those words mean nothing unless you act upon them. And I said that to the people of Afghanistan—the Taliban. They didn't listen, and so we acted. And removing the Taliban—is a clear signal that we won't tolerate safe haven. In other words, if you harbor the terrorist, you're just as guilty as the murderers. And that's a clear signal that the United States must continue to send in order to win the war on terror.

We saw a threat in Saddam Hussein. Obviously, this issue is one that has caused a lot of people to wonder about certain aspects, caused me to wonder about the capacity of our intelligence services to provide good intelligence. And that's why we're constantly working to reform the intelligence services, to make sure we get the best intelligence, because I thought there would be weapons of mass destruction, and so did everybody else in the world, and so did people in the United States Congress from both political parties—thought that there would be weapons of mass destruction.

The United Nations and the United Nations Security Council thought there would be weapons of mass destruction. After all, they passed a unanimous resolution that said, "Disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences." In other words, we worked the diplomatic front.

And so when Saddam Hussein chose war—and believe me, he made the choice. The hardest thing for the President of the United States to do is commit troops into combat. It's the last option, the very last option. Except September the 11th taught me—and September the 11th taught me that we've got to take threats seriously. And the world saw a threat. This man was harboring terrorists. He was on the state sponsor of terrorists list. I didn't put him on there; he was

put on there by previous Presidents. He was firing at our pilots. He had invaded countries. He was a threat. And the world spoke with one voice and said, "Disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences." And when the United States says something, it must mean it. And we said, "Disclose, or face serious consequences." And when he wouldn't, he faced serious consequences. Removing Saddam Hussein has made America safer and the world a better place.

And we have a plan to achieve victory. Victory is a state, a democracy that can sustain itself and defend itself and join America in fighting the war on terror. That's the goal of victory. That's the definition of victory.

First, part of our strategy is a political strategy. I try to tell people how I make decisions. And part of making good decisions is, you've got to believe something. You have a belief system that, by the way, can't alter because of politics or polls or focus groups or what somebody wants you to think. And I believe that freedom is universal. I believe that deep in everybody's soul is the desire to be free. That's what I believe. I don't believe freedom or liberty is confined here to Methodists from Texas. I believe everybody wants to be free—white, black, brown, Muslim, Jew, Christian, agnostic. I believe there is a deep desire for people to be free.

And if you believe that, then you have faith in people demanding freedom, if given a chance. And the Iraqis proved that theory right. Eleven million people went to the polls in the face of unbelievable terror, terrorist threats, and said, "I want to be free; let me vote; let me decide my future." And so on the political front, they're making progress because of the courage of the Iraqis.

And now the task at hand is to work with those who won votes in the new Parliament to set up a unity Government; one that is—can help deal with the grievances of the past; one that unites under the fabric of democracy. And that's what we're doing. I talked to the Ambassador, Zal Khalilzad, there yesterday. He's spent a lot of time working with making our position known that we want the Government to be a unified government.

Secondly, we're helping the country rebuild itself after years of neglect, so that people can see the benefits of democracy. And

we started off initially with, kind of, these grand projects. We got the Congress to appropriate money, and we tried to build some great electricity-type renovations. And the enemy kept blowing them up, and so we've altered our strategy. One of the things that you've got to do in a situation like this is constantly adjust. You can't just get stuck in one kind of response mode. You've got to think and watch the enemy and adjust to the enemy in order to achieve an objective. And we're doing that. So now we've got much smaller-scale projects that are yielding instant results for the people on the ground, so people say, "Wait a minute—this democracy deal is a pretty good thing," you know.

Businesses are flourishing in Iraq. Freedom is coming; freedom is coming. There's a determined enemy trying to stop it, of course. They can't stand freedom. I told you, they think the exact opposite we do. They don't believe that everybody desires to be free. They want everybody to live under their totalitarian thumb. That's what they want. Not America and our coalition, we want governments to be responsible and responsive to the people. That's what we believe in.

Thirdly, in order to achieve our objective, the Iraqis are going to have to fight the enemy. They've proven their worth, in terms of defying the terrorists when it comes to making the vote, and they're proving their desire to defend themselves against the enemy too. You know how I know? I'm listening to the people on the ground. I talk to our commanders a lot. They're the ones who are giving me the appraisal about how well these Iraqis are being trained.

An interesting measurement, right off the bat, however, was how the Iraqis responded to these attacks on the police stations and the recruiting stations. You remember, they had a series of attacks on the recruiting stations? Guess what my question was to them out there: Are there still people lining up to join up? If you're getting blown up standing in line, are they still coming? And the answer was, absolutely. And we're training them, and there's a command structure—command and control structure getting in place. And this military is getting better and better. We're turning over a lot of territory to the Iraqis. They now have two divisions, which is a lot

of folks, that are capable of taking the fight nearly on their own. The training mission is working.

So on the security side, we're on the hunt. We're after Zarqawi. See, he wants us to leave. He believes we'll lose our nerve so he can establish a safe haven in Iraq. And we're not going to let him do it. And so we've got great special operators and U.S. forces and coalition forces on the hunt. And at the same time, we're training the Iraqis.

There's a big debate in Washington about who gets to decide the troop levels. Well, those troop levels will be decided by this administration, and this administration is going to listen, not to politicians but to the commanders on the ground, of what we need on the ground in order to win this deal.

After I leave here, I'm going to go visit with a family of one of the fallen troops. I have to be able to look that person in the eye, and say, "The cause is just." I believe it is just and necessary. And I have to look that person in the eye and say that the sacrifice of your loved one will not go in vain, that we will complete the mission. And that's what I want to assure my fellow citizens. No matter what it looks like in Washington, DC, I'm committed to victory in Iraq so—to achieve peace.

And so in the short term, we're going to succeed in Iraq. We'll deny them safe haven. We'll stay on the hunt. But there has to be a long-term strategy as well, to win. And that long-term strategy is to liberate people and give them the chance to live under the greatest system of government ever, and that's democracy—because democracies respond to people.

You know, our foreign policy in the broader Middle East for a long period of time was just kind of, tolerate the status quo and hope for the best. It didn't work. The surface looked placid, but beneath the surface was brewing resentment and anger and fertile recruiting opportunities for those who have got a dark vision of the future. And so we're working to help the Iraqis develop a democracy.

Elections are only the beginning of democracy, not the end. Election is the beginning of a process where government listens to the people. In order to make sure democracy



works, there has to be institution-building and support for young, fledgling democracies. And that's what you're seeing. This is an historic moment. The world is changing because freedom is on the march. And we shouldn't be discouraged about setbacks—short-term setbacks or the enemy's capacity to take innocent life because we've seen democracy change the world in the past.

I think about all the wars fought in Europe over the past 100 years. A hundred years seems like a long time, probably, for the little guy there—me too. It seems like a while—I'm only 59 years old. But Americans shed a lot of blood in Europe, World War I and World War II. And yet, the continent is—Europe is peaceful. You know why? Because there's democracies living side by side in peace. Democracies don't fight each other. Generally, people in a democracy don't campaign and say, "Vote for me; I promise you war." They say, "Vote for you—vote for me; I'll work for the peace; I want your children to grow up in a peaceful world." That's what people say to get elected.

Japan—one of my favorite analogies and stories about this is my friend Koizumi, Prime Minister of Japan. He's an interesting guy. I like him a lot. We spend time talking about the peace. He understands that democracy in the heart of the Middle East, a democracy in a part of the world that is desperate for freedom, is an important part of laying the foundation for peace. And so he committed Japanese troops to help the Iraqis rebuild their country and to provide security so they could rebuild their country.

What's amazing about this is that, like many whose relatives—like many here whose relatives fought against the Japanese, my dad did too. Isn't that interesting? Eighteen-year-old kid, Navy fighter pilot, country calls him; like thousands, he goes overseas to fight the sworn enemy, the Japanese. And today, this guy's son is sitting down with the Prime Minister of Japan working to keep the peace. And what happened in between was that a Japanese-style democracy grew. Democracies yield the peace. And what the youngsters here have to see that's happening is, we're laying that foundation for peace. Someday, when you're old and—older, I know you never think it's going to happen, but it

does—you'll look back and say, "Maybe old George W. Bush and the United States Congress was right in keeping the faith that democracies can yield the peace we all want."

I got two other things, two other things I want to tell you, then I'll answer questions. We not only protect ourselves by keeping the pressure on the enemy and defeating them over there so we don't have to face them here at home, we've got to protect ourselves by doing smart things in America. I hope—I appreciate working with the mayors on homeland security issues. We're training a lot of first-responders and getting people ready in case something happens.

Secondly, in order to ask our folks on the frontline of protecting America to do the job, they've got to have all the tools. And the PATRIOT Act passed right after September the 11th—had a little problem getting it out of the United States Senate, it got kind of hung up there. My reminder to those Senators is that the bill may—about ready to lapse, but the threat isn't. And if people in Washington expect those on the frontline of protecting America to do their job, they got to give them the tools. The PATRIOT Act needs to be passed.

Finally, I made a decision that has been in the news lately, and I want to share with you my thinking, because it's an important decision. September the 11th made it clear to me that an enemy would do anything it could to hurt us. We're at war. I understand some don't think that, that we're at war. There are good, decent Americans who believe that. I know that. This is not what I—I don't believe it, see. I got a different point of view. I asked our people on the ground there in Washington, is there anything more we can do to protect the American people? What can we do? The enemy wants to hit us; they're planning to hit us. Is there anything we can do so I can go around the country saying, "Go about your business; we're taking care of your security for you"? I think most people would ask that question.

And General Mike Hayden of the NSA—he's a wonderful person—said he thought there was something more we could do. And he showed me the plans for this country to pick up a conversation—listen to conversations from people outside the country, inside

the country, who had an affiliation with Al Qaida or were Al Qaida. He said, "I think we can design a program, Mr. President, that will enable us to have quick response to be able to detect and deter a potential attack."

I said, that's interesting, General. I said, that makes a lot of sense to me. I said, you're not going to listen inside the country. "No, this is calls from outside the country in, or inside out, to people who we know or suspect are affiliated with Al Qaida." And I remember some of those phone calls coming out of California prior to the September the 11th attacks by the killers—just thinking maybe if we'd have listened to those on a quick-response basis, you know, it might have helped prevent the attacks.

My second question was, is it legal? See, I take that oath of office seriously—I've taken it twice as your President—to uphold the laws and the Constitution. And so we got lawyers all over Washington, as I'm sure you can imagine. [Laughter] I'm not one. I said, is it legal? I'm asking this to the Attorney General of the United States, the Legal Counsel in the White House; NSA has got lawyers. I mean, a lot of lawyers looked at this, and they said, "You bet, Mr. President, it's legal." And they gave me the legal ramifications. You'll see this all—this is part of the debate.

Thirdly, I knew I needed to tell Members of Congress. See, they like to be a part of the process. They're a co-equal branch of Government, and I recognize that, and I honor that. And so we briefed Members of the United States Congress on the full program so that they would know—appropriate Members of Congress, leaders, Republicans, and Democrats, leaders of the Intelligence Committee whose job it is to provide oversight on intelligence operations. They were abreast. Like my old buddy called me, he said, "You know something, if you're trying to pull one over on them, if you're trying to have an illegal program, why are you briefing the Congress?" I said, because I want people to know.

Unfortunately, we're having this discussion. It's too bad, because guess who listens to the discussion: the enemy. If you don't think we're at war, it doesn't matter then, does it? I know we're at war. And the enemy is adjusting. But I'm going to tell you some-

thing, I'm doing the right thing. Washington is a town that says, "You didn't connect the dots," and then when you do connect the dots, they say, "You're wrong." In order to protect America, if somebody is talking to Al Qaida, we want to know who they are and why they're talking to them.

Okay. That's what's on my mind. Now, what's on yours? Yes, sir. Go ahead and yell it.

### **Homeownership**

**Q.** Mr. President, I just wanted to take an opportunity to tell you that I think our country is blessed to have you as our President.

**The President.** Thank you.

**Q.** That—we are very thankful that you don't make your decisions based on the polls, like previous Presidents have.

**The President.** Well, I appreciate that.

**Q.** And my comment is, is that I'm a homebuilder. I'm very happy right now.

**The President.** You've got to be. [Laughter]

**Q.** But I wanted to just keep you apprised that things are good now; the economy is good; interest rates are low. There are people that still can't afford homes in our country today. Affordable housing is very important. We, as homebuilders—I served on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Homebuilders.

**The President.** Good.

**Q.** We'll be up in Washington in about a month or so to see you guys. But we're concerned with the environment just as much as anyone else is, and—but there's got to be a balance to make sure that we can develop land and provide homes, affordable homes. And also Congress is working on some things now that has an affect on financing and interest rates for people buying their first homes. And let's make sure that we have affordable homes for people.

My daughter is a school teacher here in Tampa, and it's important to people like her, people that protect us—the fire department, the sheriffs—they need homes. The times are good now, and I was a builder when your friend Jimmy Carter was President, and interest rates weren't so good back then, and those were tough times. And I just want to

tell you that I'm blessed to be here today with you in this room, and we all love you.

**The President.** Well, thanks. Let me talk about that. Thank you. You'll be happy to hear, I don't set interest rates. *[Laughter]* That's set by an independent body. And I just named a new Chairman of the Fed to do that. He's a good fellow. And so if I were you, I'd be worried about interest rates, because when the interest rates go up, it makes it harder for your school teacher.

Well, there's help, to help certain folks who qualify with their downpayments. We want people owning their own home. See, that's—we want this to be an ownership society. We want people owning their own business; we want people owning their own home; we want people owning their own health account they can take with them from job to job like health savings accounts. And homeownership is high right now. More minorities own a home than ever before in our Nation's history, which is a fantastic statistic.

But interest rates matter, as does good tax policy. Maybe you're hinting at whether or not the mortgage deduction would be part of a plan. I don't think you have to worry about the mortgage deduction not being a part of the income-tax law. But thank you for bringing that up.

Yes, sir. Go ahead and yell it. Let me get a mike for you.

### **Florida Coastline/Energy**

**Q.** Mr. President, you mentioned a trip next week to visit the sources of renewable, additional technology to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. We have a not-so-renewable resource, which is our precious Florida coastline. And because of your great brother, we do have an unemployment rate of 3.3 percent. How can you work with us to protect our Florida shoreline with respect to offshore drilling?

**The President.** Well, I made a commitment that nothing is going to happen within 100 miles of this coastline, and I'm honoring the commitment. I don't care what people might be saying—I guess maybe they quit saying it after the '04 campaign—but it's a commitment that this Government has—at least my Government has made, and I'm going to honor it. When we say 100 miles

off the coastline, we don't mean 99 or 89, we mean 100. So rest easy.

Now, the thing about—look, we've got to get off of hydrocarbons. We just do. And I'm a believer in nuclear power. I think it's a—maybe someday, and I think we'll—I'll figure out—I'll find out how close we are when I visit with some of these solar technology people, but it's very likely that you'll become a little power generator in your own home, and that the excess power that you do not use, you feed back in the grid. Hybrid batteries—batteries for plug-in hybrid automobiles are pretty close, they tell me. And I'm going to see firsthand—sometimes the President gets the cook's tour, I know it—*[laughter]*—but nevertheless, I'm going to see firsthand.

Now, what's interesting is, is that a lot of people in urban areas are not going to drive more than 30 miles a day. And so we're developing automobile engines that can run on electricity for 30 miles, and then if you go more, your gasoline kicks in. But it requires a battery that has got good storage capacity and is easy to recharge. It's coming.

And so there's a lot of technologies that are coming on the market, and we're spending money. And it's a good use of taxpayers' money, it seems like to me, in order to achieve some big objectives.

I'm going to India on March the 1st, around that period of time, and I believe that it's good policy for the United States to encourage these emerging economies to use clean energy, nuclear power, so as to help reduce demand for, kind of, nonrenewables. And so I'm going to talk to them about development of a civilian nuclear power industry. They're telling me China has got about 34 plants on the market, which is good. But this expansion of nuclear power—which is in our interests, by the way; it's in our interests because of the quality of the air; it's in our interests because it takes—reduces demand, global demand—is going to create another issue, and that is, what are we going to do with the spent fuel? This country doesn't reprocess spent fuel; we should. Reprocessing spent fuel means that we're able to continue to reuse the base material that went through the burn the first time in a plant and reduce the amount that we have to then eventually store. And we chose not to do that in the

late '70s because of proliferation concerns. I'm convinced we can work internationally to address those issues.

And so I'm just sharing with you—we got a full strategy to help us make us less dependent on energy—on foreign sources of energy.

Yes, sir.

### **Transportation**

**Q.** Commissioner Reynolds from Winter Garden in the central part of the State.

**The President.** Oh, yes, I know where you are.

**Q.** Pressed into service by your brother, Honorable Jeb Bush.

**The President.** Is that good or bad? If it's bad, take it up with him. [*Laughter*]

**Q.** I thought about calling him and asking him if he'd like to have the job back.

**The President.** That's right. [*Laughter*]

**Q.** The concerns from the central part of the State is, we've got a really unprecedented growth rate there in the middle part. The challenge is for mass transportation to free us from the oil that you talk about. Unfortunately, the proportionate share of funding that we're able to secure seems to be tied into porkbarrel, like light rail which—Congressman Mica needs to buy into the fact that it's not realistic. So how do we get free from that so we can get direct funding for mass transit?

**The President.** Yes. That will be something that you'll be able to effect 5 years from now, because I signed the highway bill, and it's done. And nobody wants to deal with it again until it expires, to be frank with you. But I understand—but what he's saying is, how come you just don't let Floridians decide how to spend the money that's supposed to go back to them? Why do you earmark parts of the bill? That's what you're saying. And I do think Congress needs to work on earmark reform. I'm just not one of these guys—if there's no hope, I got to let you know, brother. There ain't no hope. [*Laughter*] They're not going to revisit the highway bill. They're just not going to revisit the highway bill until the highway bill expires. And then perhaps you can get the kind of—they can get the kind of reforms. As you know, I ain't going to be around. [*Laughter*]

Yes, sir. I've heard from Jeb on this issue, by the way.

### **Alternative Sources of Energy**

**Q.** Mr. President, welcome back to Tampa.

**The President.** Thank you.

**Q.** And my question is, you've talked a lot about our addiction to oil today. You've also talked about advanced, alternative fuel sources, in particular for household vehicles as a potential mitigant to that dilemma. But we have a very robust, industrialized economy—air, rail, shipping, trucking—that has depended on oil, frankly, for generations to be successful and vibrant. So my question is, how do we maintain the most advanced, industrialized economy on Earth and actually reduce our dependency on oil going forward?

**The President.** Well, I believe—first of all, natural gas has driven a lot of our industrialized growth, as you know. And we are—we need to have—import liquified natural gas if we're going to be modern and stay competitive.

Listen, we're going to need oil. The question is, are we able to reduce dependency from certain parts of the world. And I think that by relieving pressure on how we drive our cars, we'll, in fact, help segments of our economy that are going to take a while to diversify away from hydrocarbons, I guess is the best kind of macro look.

Things don't happen instantly; I understand that. But nevertheless, there are some practical ways that we can reduce our dependency, and it seems like to me, the most practical way is to change automobiles, change how we drive. In the short term, ethanol and hybrid batteries makes the most sense to me. It's the most practical way and most economic way to begin the reduction of dependency.

Now, listen, we've got a large fleet—I told you, there's four-and-a-half [million]<sup>\*</sup> flex-fuel cars. That's good, except there's about 200 million cars. And it takes a while for fleets to renew. And so things don't happen instantly, but they will happen quicker as we continue to press for innovation and technology.

<sup>\*</sup> White House correction.

Ultimately, I believe that we're going to be using hydrogen to power our automobiles. But that's 15 years down the—for the technology to be applicable is 15 years down the road. And I guess what I'm not only—I guess I am, what I'm telling you is that we see technological breakthroughs pretty darn quick when it comes to ethanol and hybrid batteries, which is a positive development for the people. And it's an interesting thing about ethanol is that the barriers to entry are pretty low, when it comes to manufacturing—if the technology says that we can—yields the capacity to convert switch grasses and refuses to ethanol, once that technological breakthrough comes, the barriers to entry are pretty low when it comes to building the manufacturing capacity that converts raw material to ethanol. Much different from a big cracker refinery. And so that's positive. So we've got the car technology, hopefully have the breakthrough technology on fuel, and then the infrastructure will follow.

And so what I'm saying is, this is the most practical way to become less dependent on oil. And the economy will continue to function. But things are happening, by the way, in diesel. I don't know visiting your area—if any of you know something about trucking, you know that diesel, clean diesel engines are coming. We did a deal in my administration to work with diesel engine manufacturers to come up with a very low-emission engine that is now being applied in trucks, and it's going to make a difference—on Caterpillar tractors. We're getting there; we're getting there.

Thanks for the question. Yes, sir.

### ***Spread of Democracy/America's Influence Abroad***

**Q.** —it seems to me that we are facing in this country—I've had the opportunity to interface with people of Muslim countries, and the war is bad enough, and I applaud what you're doing because freedom is important, but what concerns me is if the youth in these nations are being taught that you and I and us Americans are, in fact, the devil incarnate or Satan, himself—I guess my question is, what can we do about that, to win over the people, the children, the youth, so that the next generation will not be facing

this same dilemma? I think this is an incredible problem.

**The President.** I appreciate that. First, is to support and work with moderate governments, and there are a lot. The largest Muslim nation is Indonesia. And we're working closely with the President there to help promote a better understanding of different religions. I will be seeing President Musharraf, who I like, and he's a good fellow, who understands that moderation is an important part of a hopeful future. And so support Governments that practice moderation.

Secondly, provide assistance when assistance is needed. In my State of the Union, I said, we've got to reject isolationism. Isolationism is the tendency for a nation to withdraw and not feel an obligation to be involved in the world. And we cannot defend ourselves if we're isolationist. I just made the case. But I also believe, and part of my philosophy in the decisionmaking is, to whom much has been given, much is required. And therefore, when we see suffering in places like Pakistan or because of the tsunami, the United States of America is leading the way in.

And it helps. It helped a lot in Pakistan, for example, to see those choppers flying relief supplies up for poor folks who had been—whose lives had been just devastated. I can't remember the exact numbers, but President Musharraf told me; we're talking hundreds of thousands of people either dead, injured, or displaced. And there was the United States of America military flying in supplies. I believe, John Abizaid—General Abizaid told me today that we turned over our MASH unit to the Pakistani Government to help so they could continue to provide aid and comfort.

And so there are practical ways. One is to support moderation, and two, help where help is needed. Our HIV/AIDS initiative, by the way, is a fantastic initiative. It is—I can't tell you how proud I am of the American people for supporting this. It is necessary for the United States of America to be taking the lead on this issue to save lives. If we say, human dignity matters and every life is precious, if that's part of a credo as a country, which it is—that's what we say. We say, "People matter; every human life is precious."

Then those human lives apply not just here at home but on the continent of Africa or in Muslim countries. And there's a lot of Muslims in Africa who've seen the great compassion of the United States of America when it comes to helping to battle HIV/AIDS. There's a pandemic taking place. And you ought to be proud of this country, like I am, that we're filling that void of compassion and need and hope.

Yes. Right here. Yes. You're next. Yes. Yes, ma'am.

### **Helping America's Youth Initiative**

**Q.** I know that you and First Lady Bush have talked much about our hurting generation of teens and our unproductive teens in our communities. Just wanted you to talk a little bit about the efforts being made with the work that you're doing in initiatives—

**The President.** Thanks.

**Q.** —that will help that.

**The President.** I appreciate that. First, there's positive news. Teen pregnancies are down; teen drug use is down. And that's positive. That's good—because of people at the grassroots level—people at the grassroots level. I think one of the most important initiatives of this administration is to—is the Faith-Based and Community Initiative, which recognizes what de Tocqueville saw in the 1830s. He's a French guy who came over here—[laughter]—in case you don't remember. And he recognized that the great strength of America was the capacity for individualists—or the willingness of individualists to work together in what he called voluntary associations to make the community in which they live a better place. And he saw that in the 1830s.

It's a—what he saw is still the strength of our country, if you really think about it. You know, Government can hand out money, but Government cannot put a hope in a person's heart. A lot of people miss one of the basics ingredients of life, and that is love. And love happens when somebody puts an arm around a person and says, "What can I do to help you, brother or sister?"

And so part of our initiative in dealing with loneliness, discouragement, lack of self-esteem, is to encourage faith-based programs—which all exist because they hear a

universal call to love a neighbor, by the way—to have access to Federal money, in other words, level the playing field for grant money so that these programs—which have been set up to love somebody and provide love—have got equal access to Federal money. It's a really important initiative.

There are targeted monies, of course. There's monies aimed at the different community groups dealing with drug use. But I think the most important initiative of all is to empower groups that really do provide mentoring and care and decency on an individual basis for somebody who needs it. And it's happening. It's happening in America.

Yes.

### **Culture of Life**

**Q.** Mr. President, it's an honor to be here with you today, and I thank you so much for the time that you take to share with us. I'm a 40-year-old father of a 3-year-old.

**The President.** There you go.

**Q.** And I'm also an adopted child. And it seems that, anymore, through the results of legislation from the bench, that maybe the unsafest place for a child in this country is in his or her mother's womb. And my question for you is—and I commend you for your Supreme Court picks. I thank you for your bold stance in who you picked. My question is, with my son—this is the future of America. And my question is, where do you believe we're headed? Long after your term of serving us has ended and long after we've had other Presidents serve this country, where do you think we're headed in the areas of abortion, in the areas of traditional marriage, in the areas of faith and the foundations that this country was founded upon that are so under attack anymore? Where do you believe we're going?

**The President.** I'm an optimist. I believe we're headed toward a period of personal responsibility, where people understand that they're responsible for the decisions they make in life.

I just gave you some statistics. Abortions are down in America as well, by the way. People are—one of my jobs is to promote a culture of life. And I just told you every life is precious, and I meant it, whether it be here at home or on the continent of Africa

where somebody's suffering from HIV/AIDS. And so I'm an optimist. I think people are beginning to understand that there is virtue in being personally responsible for the decisions you make in life.

And that—there's a—and cultures change, and it takes a while for cultures to change. All of us—I'm not going to peg anybody a certain age around here, but those of us born, like, around '46, '47, '48, we've seen a culture change in our lifetime, if you really think about it. The culture changed, and it can change again. And I think these statistics that show that some problems that seemed incurable at one point in our history indicate that there is a cultural shift. A lot of it has to do with people being responsible. Some of it has to do with there's a religious awakening around many communities in the country, not just Christian religion, Jewish religion, Muslim religion. People are becoming religious in America. And that, in itself, helps people realize that you've got to be conscious of the decisions you make and mindful of the needs of others.

And—but we still got challenges. One of the things that obviously undermines good teaching at home is TV and some of the movies. But I remind people, they put “off” and “on” knobs on TVs for a reason. You don't have to go to a movie if you don't want to go to a movie. See, I think you can promote responsibility at home and still live in the free society where people are allowed to express themselves. And my advice to parents is, pay attention to the Internet. Part of the problem we have in our society is people aren't paying attention to their kids' habits. And when you've got your child on the Internet, make sure you know what that child is looking at, because that's your responsibility. It's not the Government's responsibility to take care of your child; it's your responsibility to take care of your child.

### **President's Personal Values**

**Q.** Thank you for being our President. We are all way better off and very safe—

**The President.** Thanks. It's my high honor, by the way.

**Q.** Thank you.

**The President.** I'm glad I did it.

**Q.** We appreciate it. How do you—earlier you shared with us some intimacy about how you make decisions, and I felt that was heartfelt. How do you keep it together? What do you really think about when the biggest story this week was Dick Cheney's hunting trip and not Al Gore blasting our troops and being treasonous in his regard to this war on terror in the Middle East? How do you keep it together?

**The President.** Well, I appreciate that. That's a loaded question. [*Laughter*] I keep it in perspective. There's a lot of noise in Washington. There's a lot of flattery; there's a lot of criticism; there's just a lot of noise. And I keep it in—I try to keep my life in perspective. I try to—I don't try to; I do keep my life in perspective. And I am focused on achieving certain objectives. Every day—I've said this, and I mean this—every day I think about how to protect America. Every day in the morning, first thing in the morning, I get briefed by our intelligence officers about potential threats. Every morning I'm aware of the world around us. And I told you that it's—9/11 changed my thinking. My focus is there.

You know, I care deeply about troubled youth. I'm worried about Katrina victims. I'm worried about people that got moved out of their home, and they ended up somewhere else. Put yourself in their perspective. I said homeownership is valuable. We talked about homeownership here, how important it is—and somebody wakes up the next morning and their home is gone. And not only that, they ended up out, somewhere else, you know. The good news is those people found love, which is a wonderful thing about our country. And I think about those kind of things.

So to answer your question—and I appreciate that—first, I'm wise enough not to fall into your trap because—[*laughter*]—there are some keen reporters paying attention to every word I'm saying. [*Laughter*] But I really don't let that bother me. I've got my perspective, and I've got my priorities. My faith is a priority. My family is a priority. Look, we got to deal with issues, of course, when they come up. That's part of—it's part of Washington. It's part of being the President. There's—issues come, and they go. And

they—but I hope that when it's all said and done, people see me as a strategic thinker and that I'm able to stay focused on a strategy that will leave behind peace and hope—peace around the world and hope not only around the world but equally importantly, here at home, so people have this sense of the greatness of America. It's a—we're a fantastic country.

Think about a country—when you really put America in perspective, ours is a country where somebody can come with nothing except drive and desire, and end up being able to raise a family and realize dreams. It is a fantastic land. And the great thing about America is it doesn't matter who you are, you know, if you got the drive and the desire and the willingness, you can make it in this country. And it's a powerful—it's a powerful—that's a powerful statement to make. And that's the way we need to keep it, by the way. And so—I don't even know how I got there, but anyway. *[Laughter]*

Yes, ma'am.

### **Immigration/Social Security Reform**

**Q.** In light of national security, some of us baby boomers are going to retire in the next 3 to 5 years.

**The President.** There you go. I know how you're thinking, baby. *[Laughter]* I'm right there with you. *[Laughter]*

**Q.** And the number of people replacing us is only at about 63 percent. So what are we going to do with immigration to make sure we have enough people to fill those positions?

**The President.** Yes, it's interesting; I thought you were going a different direction. *[Laughter]* I'm going to answer two questions. I thought you were taking me down that Social Security route, because it's a really interesting—that's a really interesting way to frame the immigration debate. Really is, I haven't heard it put that way.

Let me answer immigration first and then talk about the unfunded liabilities inherent in Medicare and Social Security as a result of baby boomers like me and you retiring with not enough people to pay it, to pay the bill.

First, immigration. There are a lot of people working here in America doing jobs

Americans will not do. And that is a fact. And it's a—as I told you, we deal with the way the world—the way it is, not the way we hope that it is, and therefore, how to deal with that issue, what do you do? You got people working here, doing jobs Americans won't do.

My attitude is, you recognize it for what it is, and you say, "You can do this on a temporary basis." You say, if there's a willing employer and a willing worker on a job an American won't do, then it's okay to fill that job, so long as you're not here permanently, so long as this is not—*[applause]*. And so I believe there ought to be a temporary-worker program. We've tried this in America before—pretty successful, at least in my own home State of Texas. You got people—old Red Putnam over there, he's got people—probably have been bringing people in to pick oranges for awhile, I don't know. Agriculture relies upon a lot of people willing to do the work that others won't do. And it seems like to me that there ought to be a legal way to make this happen without creating a sense of amnesty or permanency.

And so, one, I have a deal with immigration rationally. Now, we've got an obligation to enforce our borders and our coastlines, and we're spending a lot of money to do so. The Texas border is long, and it's hard to enforce. I mean, it's a lot of miles, a lot of empty country. And so we're using new technologies, drones, infrared, some mounds, some fencing in cities, to try to make it harder for people to cross. But the truth of the matter is, a lot of our Border Patrol agents are chasing people who are coming here to work, see. And it seems like to me that if we could have a rational system that would enable people to do this on a temporary basis, it would take the pressures off the borders. People would be able to come in here in a rational, legal way.

Now, as I told you, I'm not for amnesty. You got about 8 million-plus people here illegally. My worry is if the—all of a sudden legal citizens, then another 8 million comes. And I don't think that makes any sense. So in terms of immigration, I'm for border enforcement, and strong border enforcement, with a rational guest-worker program that's temporary in nature, where it's understood



that you're working here for a period of time, then you're going back on home.

Now, I want to talk to you about what's happened as a result of the current program. When you make something illegal, and there's a—you know, people coming here to work; people figure out ways around it. I'm not old enough to remember the old whisky days of Prohibition, but I remember reading about it—people still made whisky because people wanted to drink it.

And so guess what's happening today? We've got people getting stuffed in the back of 18-wheelers, driving across hot desert to find jobs that most often or not Americans won't do. There's a whole smuggling industry as a result of making temporary work—not making it legal. A whole smuggling industry—*coyotes* they're called—and it's inhumane. It just is, any way you look at it.

You know, family values don't stop at the Rio Grande River. If you've got starving children and there's a job over here in America that pays you more than it does in Mexico that an American won't do, you'll come and do that job and get that money back to your family.

Secondly, one way to make immigration policy work is you've got to enforce the law. And so you've got to go to employers. I'm not going to come to your home building site—but anyway. [Laughter] You come to enforce the law, right? And so you're a home builder out here in the Tampa area; a bunch of people show up, roofers show up, and say, you know, "We're legal; here's my card." You're not in the business of telling me whether or not that's a forged document or not. You don't know. It looks real. And that's all you're expected—but I'm telling you, they're forging these documents. There's a whole underground industry. They're smuggling people, and they're forging documents. And our borders are being over—it makes it much harder to enforce. And so I think by having a rational plan—temporary worker, no amnesty—will expose these people runners and drug—document forgers for what they are. So that's my answer on immigration.

Now, Social Security and Medicare. They're giving me the hook, by the way; I've got another speech here in Florida. Laura

said, "Whatever you do, don't be too windy." [Laughter] I didn't listen to her.

You bring up a huge problem, and that is, she identified something younger workers better be asking politicians to do something about, and that is, just to put it blunt, Social Security is going broke. And the reason why is a baby boom generation, like some of us here, are fixing to retire. And there's a lot of us, and we've been promised greater benefits than the previous generation, and there are fewer people paying in the system. And it's difficult—

**Audience member.** [Inaudible]

**The President.** —and we're living longer, yes, thank you. [Laughter] Yes, cameras and everything, they're—leave your name with them. [Laughter] She's right, and we're living longer. I wish I'd have thought of that. [Laughter]

We've got to do something about it, and I tried last year. The job of the President is not to pass problems on but to confront them. That's my job. That's what you expect people to do. And I'm going to continue trying. And so they said, "Well, we don't have a problem." Well, one thing people now have recognized is we got a problem. I succeeded. Not only did I succeed, others succeeded too, in reminding—we've got the issue, talking it up.

People are now beginning to realize what you realize and I realize, that we're going to fine—it's just the people paying in the payroll taxes. Can you imagine looking at youngsters in the eye, and say, "Pay in the payroll taxes," and you know the system is going broke? That's not a good deal. And so in the State of the Union, I said, "Look, I tried it; I'm going to try it again," is basically what I said. This time I believe that we need to have a table with Republican and Democrats sitting around it, and sit down and get something done. This isn't going to pass unless it's—people from both parties can come up with something to do. There's just too much opposition one way or the other, unless there's a bipartisan solution. I believe the American people are pretty sick and tired of needless partisanship in Washington, DC, and I know they expect us to get some stuff done.

And so I just want to assure you, I'm going to keep trying and keep trying and keep trying because it's the right thing to do. It's the right thing to uphold the honor of our offices by confronting these problems now, and not saying, "It's okay for another President," or "It's okay for another Congress," and just keep shuffling it down the path. Now is the time to get it done, because the longer you wait, the worse the problem gets. Every year that goes by, the problem gets worse for a next generation of Americans.

Okay, I've got the hook. Listen, let me conclude—yes, ma'am. Anybody who makes that kind of noise—

#### **Uganda/Sudan**

**Q.** I did not do that.

**The President.** Okay, good. [Laughter]

**Q.** It's a small part of the world, but it's very important to me—I'm concerned about the children in northern Uganda who are the victims of the rebel Joseph Kony. And I'm wondering if you can bring any pressure to bear on President Museveni to stop that 20-year war and free those children from the bondage that they're under.

**The President.** Really interesting question. She's talking about the—northern Uganda. There's a group called the Lord's Group that has been terrorizing both northern Uganda and southern Sudan. I talked to Mrs. Garang, John Garang's widow. John Garang was the head of the Sudanese in the southern part of the country that, by the way, became adopted by a church in Midland, Texas, my old hometown, interestingly enough. And early in my administration, I got Jack Danforth, a former United States Senator, to go and negotiate an agreement between northern Sudan and southern Sudan. And John Garang was a partner in peace. Unfortunately, he died in a helicopter accident about a year ago, I think. And the reason I bring this up is that there's no doubt it would be easier to deal with the Lord's Group if we were able to achieve peace between north and south Sudan. They take advantage of instability.

I have talked to this—I've talked about this issue with Mrs. Garang, as well as—now, there are peacekeepers in the region, by the way, U.N. peacekeepers on the north-south

accord. I hope they're effective at helping the people of southern Sudan. I have talked to Museveni, President Museveni, about the issue as well, and I've been with him, I think, two or three times. I know on two occasions we've talked about this—and will continue to talk to him about it. I'm very aware of the issue.

My hope is that by having a southern Sudanese—having the peace agreement negotiated between north and south so the southern Sudanese can begin to get their lives back in order, get the oil money moving that's guaranteed to them, will help provide—help drive them out of any safe haven in the south, which will make it easier for all of us to deal. It's kind of a roundabout answer, but I'm aware of the problem, first of all. And secondly, I'm surprised that anybody in this audience would bring it up, and I thank you for that.

We also have got a major issue in Darfur, Sudan. I presume if you're worried about northern Uganda, you're also worried about western Sudan, as am I. The strategy there was to encourage African Union troops to try to bring some sense of security to these poor people that are being herded out of their villages and just terribly mistreated. We need more troops. The effort was noble, but it didn't achieve the objective.

And so I'm in the process now of working with a variety of folks to encourage there to be more troops, probably under the United Nations. I talked to Kofi Annan about this very subject this week. But it's going to require a—I think a NATO stewardship, planning, facilitating, organizing, probably double the number of peacekeepers that are there now, in order to start bringing some sense of security. There has to be a consequence for people abusing their fellow citizens.

At the same time, part of the issue in the Darfur region is that the rebel groups are not united in their objectives. And so politically or diplomatically, we have to work to make sure there's one voice from which to speak, so that we can then create kind of the same agreement between Government in Darfur that was created between north and south. A lot of talk, but we've got a strategy, and it's of concern, to the point where our country was the first country to call what was

taking place a genocide, which matters—words matter.

And so, thank you for bringing up that part of the world. That's very interesting that you would have that on your mind. You're a decent soul, a decent soul.

All right, I've got to go. Thanks for your time. God bless. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:26 p.m. at the Port of Tampa. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; Gen. Bryan D. Brown, USA, commander U.S. Special Operations Command; Ambassador to Italy Melvin Sembler and his wife Betty; Mayor Pam Iorio of Tampa, FL; Mayor Rick Baker of St. Petersburg, FL; Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Ayman Al-Zawahiri, founder of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and senior Al Qaida associate; former Mayor Robert Martinez of Tampa, FL; Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia; President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan; President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda; and Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations.

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## **Digest of Other White House Announcements**

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The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

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### ***February 11***

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

### ***February 13***

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing followed by a National Security Council meeting. Later, he participated in a signing ceremony for the 2006 Economic Report of the President and a photo opportunity with members of the Council of Economic Advisers.

In the afternoon, the President had lunch with Vice President Dick Cheney.

In the evening, at a private residence, the President made remarks at a National Republican Senatorial Committee reception.

The President announced his intention to nominate Robert Irwin Cusick, Jr., to be Director of the Office of Government Ethics.

The President announced his intention to nominate James Lambright to be President of the Export-Import Bank of the U.S.

The President announced his intention to nominate Jon T. Rymer to be Inspector General of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

The President announced his intention to nominate Dennis R. Spurgeon to be an Assistant Secretary of Energy (Nuclear Energy).

The President announced his intention to appoint the following individuals as members of the President's Committee on the National Medal of Science: Oliver K. Baker; Sally K. Mason; Robert Y. Moore; and Harvey S. Rosen.

The President announced his intention to appoint Samuel K. Lessey, Jr., John Stringer Rainey, and William H. Strong as members of the Board of Visitors of the U.S. Military Academy.

The President announced his intention to appoint the following individuals as members of the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation: Raymond G. Chambers; Darrell Green; Michelle Nunn; Sara Evans Schelske; and Mark G. Yudof.

The President announced his designation of the following individuals as members of a Presidential delegation to attend the closing ceremonies of the 2006 Olympic Games in Turin, Italy: Rudolph W. Giuliani (head of delegation); Ronald P. Spogli; Mario Andretti; and A. Kenneth Ciongoli.

### ***February 14***

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, in the Oval Office, the President met with the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation.

In the evening, in the State Dining Room, the President and Mrs. Bush attended a Valentine's Day dinner. Later, in the East Room, they attended a Valentine's Day performance.

**February 15**

In the morning, the President had breakfast with congressional leaders to discuss legislative priorities. Later, he had an intelligence briefing. He then met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to Columbus, OH, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Suraj Naresh Hinduja, before traveling to Dublin, OH. Then, in the employee break room at Wendy's International, Inc., Corporate Headquarters, he participated in a meeting on health savings accounts.

In the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC. Later, in the Oval Office, he participated in a signing ceremony for H.R. 4636, the Federal Deposit Insurance Reform Conforming Amendments Act of 2005.

**February 16**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he had a meeting with health insurance and business leaders to discuss health care transparency issues. He then participated in a briefing on the war on terror in Iraq with Republican Members of Congress.

In the afternoon, at the historic Evermay house, the President attended a Republican National Committee luncheon.

The President announced his intention to nominate Linda Avery Strachan to be an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Congressional Relations.

The President announced his intention to appoint Lee J. Styslinger III as a member of the President's Export Council.

The President announced his intention to appoint Joyce A. Silverthorne and Arthur W. Zimiga as members of the National Advisory Council on Indian Education.

**February 17**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. He also had a telephone conversation with Secretary General Jakob Gijssbert "Jaap" de Hoop Scheffer of NATO to discuss the situation in Darfur, Sudan.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to Tampa, FL, where, at MacDill Air Force Base, he met with USA Freedom

Corps volunteer Joe MacDougald. Later, he participated in a briefing on the war on terror with commanders of U.S. Central and Special Operations Commands.

In the afternoon, the President met with family members of a soldier killed in Iraq. Later, he traveled to Orlando, FL, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Shauna Clark. He then traveled to Lake Buena Vista, FL.

In the evening, at Disney's Contemporary Resort, the President attended a Republican Party of Florida dinner. He then returned to Washington, DC.

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**Nominations  
Submitted to the Senate**


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The following list does not include promotions of members of the Uniformed Services, nominations to the Service Academies, or nominations of Foreign Service officers.

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**Submitted February 13**

Robert Irwin Cusick, Jr., of Kentucky, to be Director of the Office of Government Ethics for a term of 5 years, vice Amy L. Comstock, resigned.

Donald J. DeGabrielle, Jr., of Texas, to be U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas for the term of 4 years, vice Michael Taylor Shelby.

James Lambright, of Missouri, to be President of the Export-Import Bank of the United States for a term expiring January 20, 2009, vice Philip Merrill, resigned.

Dennis R. Spurgeon, of Florida, to be an Assistant Secretary of Energy (Nuclear Energy), (new position).

**Submitted February 14**

Jerome A. Holmes, of Oklahoma, to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Oklahoma, vice Sven E. Holmes, resigned.

Jon T. Rymer,  
of Tennessee, to be Inspector General, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, vice Gaston L. Gianni, Jr.

Milan D. Smith, Jr.,  
of California, to be U.S. Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit, vice A. Wallace Tashima, retired.

Frank D. Whitney,  
of North Carolina, to be U.S. District Judge for the Western District of North Carolina, vice H. Brent McKnight, deceased.

#### ***Submitted February 17***

Linda Avery Strachan,  
of Virginia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, vice Mary Kirtley Waters.

Randall L. Tobias,  
of Indiana, to be Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, vice Andrew S. Natsios, resigned.

David F. Kustoff,  
of Tennessee, to be U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee for the term of 4 years, vice Terrell Lee Harris, resigned.

John Charles Richter,  
of Oklahoma, to be U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Oklahoma for the term of 4 years, vice Robert Garner McCampbell, resigned.

Amul R. Thapar,  
of Kentucky, to be U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky for the term of 4 years, vice Gregory F. Van Tatenhove, resigned.

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#### **Checklist of White House Press Releases**

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The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

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#### ***Released February 13***

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Transcripts of press briefings by Council of Economic Advisers members Katherine Baicker and Matthew J. Slaughter on the 2006 Economic Report of the President

Advanced text: Remarks by Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Frances Fragos Townsend on national preparedness to the NEMA Conference

#### ***Released February 14***

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

#### ***Released February 15***

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.R. 4636

#### ***Released February 16***

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Transcript of a press briefing by OMB Deputy Director Joel Kaplan, Under Secretary of Defense Tina W. Jonas, State Department Senior Adviser for Foreign Assistance Maria Raphael, State Department Senior Adviser for Iraq James Jeffrey on the FY 2006 emergency supplemental request for the global war on terror

Fact sheet: President Requests \$72.4 Billion for the Global War on Terror

Fact sheet: President Bush Requests \$19.8 Billion for Hurricane Recovery

#### ***Released February 17***

Transcript of a press gaggle by Deputy Press Secretary Trent Duffy

Fact sheet: President Bush Receives Briefing From Military Commanders

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**Acts Approved  
by the President**

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***Approved February 3 \****

H.R. 4659 / Public Law 109–170

To amend the USA PATRIOT ACT to extend the sunset of certain provisions of such Act

***Approved February 8 \*\****

S. 1932 / Public Law 109–171

Deficit Reduction Act of 2005

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\* This public law was inadvertently omitted from last week's issue.

***Approved February 10 \*\****

H.R. 4519 / Public Law 109–172

State High Risk Pool Funding Extension Act of 2006

***Approved February 15***

H.R. 4636 / Public Law 109–173

Federal Deposit Insurance Reform Conforming Amendments Act of 2005

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\*\* These public laws were not received in time for inclusion in the appropriate issue.